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Marxist Criticism of the Hebrew Bible

Second edition

Roland Boer

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PREFACE

This book began as a light revision of my earlier *Marxist Criticism of the Bible* from 2003. Initially, I set out to untie some of the more knotted sentences, to refresh some of the references and to spruce up some of my conclusions. But as I progressed, I found myself thoroughly rewriting whole sections, altering nearly every sentence, cutting out large chunks, adding new material (even chapters) and changing conclusions, so much so that it has ended up being a rather different book. The change in title should reflect its new status, *Marxist Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*.

Apart from a completely new introduction and conclusion, I have streamlined the introductions to the methods of each of the Marxists with whom I engage. These should be seen as initial statements, guidelines perhaps for the uninitiated. Should anyone wish to explore their work further, I cannot recommend enough the need to read their original works in all their richness. The biblical analyses are more extensive, as befitting a book that is directed at those interested in critical research on the Bible. That emphasis also signals a shift in direction from the original work. That book was read more by those engaged in Marxist literary criticism and less by students of the Bible. Indeed, that was its aim. By contrast, the present work has in mind biblical scholars, students and those interested in the Bible. Of course, I hope that Marxists too may read it with some profit, in order to gain an introduction into the rich world of Marxist biblical criticism.

It would be impossible to thank all of those have responded to the earlier book, made thoughtful suggestions and proposals and guided the current work to completion. However, I do want to mention Gale Yee, Dick Horsley, Neil Elliott, Fernando Segovia and Mark Sneed, comrades who have gone out of their way to engage in discussion and offer advice. Dominic Mattos at Bloomsbury has been extremely helpful in guiding the book through the labyrinth of

a large press. At Newcastle, Tim Stanley and I have undertaken the regular 'radicals walk' out along the breakwater of that beautiful harbour. As we did so, this work came up from time to time, as did world domination. At my other home, Renmin University of China (Beijing), Yang Huilin, Geng Youzhuang and Zhang Jing have been inspirations. Zhang Shuangli, at Fudan University's Centre for the Study of Contemporary Marxism (Shanghai), has asked me many sharp questions that have forced me to think much further. Above all, Christina Petterson has shared with me countless conversations about our various works, whether individual or joint. To her I owe inestimable thanks for our common project.

Haidian district, Beijing
February 2014

Introduction: Touchstones for Marxist criticism

Marxist biblical criticism is clearly here to stay, if its growth in the last decade is anything to go by. In that light, it should no longer be necessary to justify such an approach, whether to literature (as here) or to politics. Politically, of course, the hollow triumphalism that followed the 'fall' of the Berlin Wall in 1989 has been banished by the rolling economic crisis of Western capitalist countries since 2008. In this context, Marxism as an analytical toolset with a rich and sophisticated history, as well as socialism as political project, has not looked as bright and as promising for quite some time.[1]

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[1] By comparison with when I wrote the first edition of this book, the number of works of Marxist biblical interpretation has increased exponentially. I can list only a sample here: Neil Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994); Neil Elliott, 'Paul and the Politics of Empire: Problems and Prospects', *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation. Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl* (Richard A. Horsley (ed.); Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000), pp. 17–39; Neil Elliott, *The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008); Norman K. Gottwald, 'Sociology of Ancient Israel', *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (David Noel Freedman (ed.), vol. 6; New York: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 79–89; Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible in Its Social World and in Ours* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993); Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250–1050* BCE (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999 [1979]); Norman K. Gottwald, *The Politics of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001); Norman K. Gottwald, 'Early Israel as an Anti–Imperial Community', *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance* (Richard Horsley (ed.); Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), pp. 9–24; Richard Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress, 1992); Richard Horsley, *Galilee: History, Politics, People* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1995); Richard Horsley, *Archaeology, History and Society in Galilee*

I am loath to separate the analytical method from the political project. Some do so, urging the value of a rich and sophisticated Marxist method for understanding texts, history and society, but throwing up their hands in resignation at the perceived 'failures' of communism. But that is a fatal move, akin to assuming that feminist theory is useful for textual interpretation but that pursuing a feminist political project is delusional. The same could be said for a number of other approaches, such as ecological approaches, post-colonialism, queer studies or the analysis of race. These assumptions lie behind this book, which is concerned with Marxist approaches to reading texts from the Hebrew Bible.

In this introduction, I undertake two tasks. The first is to offer a series of touchstones for Marxist interpretation, while the second

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(Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1996); Richard Horsley (ed.), *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1997); Richard Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Order* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002); Richard Horsley, *Religion and Empire: People, Power, and the Life of the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003); Richard Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and the Politics of Second Temple Judea* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007); Richard Horsley (ed.), *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008); David Jobling, 'Feminism and "Mode of Production" in Ancient Israel: Search for a Method', *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Norman K. Gottwald on His Sixty–Fifth Birthday* (David Jobling, Peggy L. Day, and Gerald T. Sheppard (eds); Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1991), pp. 239–51; David Jobling, '"Forced Labor": Solomon's Golden Age and the Question of Representation', *Semeia* 54 (1992), pp. 57–76; David Jobling, *1 Samuel* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998); Ronald Simkins, 'Class and Gender in Early Israel', *Concepts of Class in Ancient Israel* (Mark Sneed (ed.); Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), pp. 71–86; Ronald Simkins, 'Patronage and the Political Economy of Ancient Israel', *Semeia* 87 (1999), pp. 123–44; Ronald Simkins, 'Family in the Political Ecomony of Monarchic Israel', *Bible and Critical Theory* 1, 1 (2004), pp. 1–17; Mark Sneed, 'The Social Location of the Book of Qoheleth', *Hebrew Studies* 39 (1998), pp. 41–50; Mark Sneed, 'A Middle Class in Ancient Israel?', *Concepts of Class in Ancient Israel* (Mark Sneed (ed.); Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), pp. 53–69; Mark Sneed, 'Qohelet and his "Vulgar" Critics: A Jamesonian Reading', *Bible and Critical Theory* 1, 1 (2004), pp. 1–11; Gale A. Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); Gale A. Yee, 'Recovering Marginalized Groups in Ancient Israel: Methodological Considerations', *To Break Every Yoke: Essays in Honor of Marvin L. Chaney* (Robert B. Coote and Norman K. Gottwald (eds); Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2007), pp. 10–27; Roland Boer and Jorunn Økland (eds), *Marxist Feminist Criticism of the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008).

provides a synopsis of the chapters that follow. These chapters concern the Hebrew Bible, focusing on samples of the major categories of biblical literature. In each case, I draw on the methods of a particular Western Marxist critic. Why Western Marxists? The simple answer is that I have studied them for some time and in some detail as part of my larger project on Marxism and religion. Perhaps at some future time, it may be possible to offer readings inspired by the work of Lu Xun, Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh, Anatoly Lunacharsky and other Eastern Marxists. Apart from Lunacharsky, the fascinating first Commissar for Enlightenment after the Russian Revolution, I have not completed yet my study of these Eastern Marxists.

However, before I proceed, a word is perhaps needed on the development of Marxist literary criticism. Literature forms part of the realm of culture, which is itself one component of the wide realm of Marxist analysis. That analysis refuses the fragmented approach so common in our day, according to which small pieces of lived experience are broken away from others and studied in isolation. Instead, a Marxist approach includes the dimensions of culture, ideology, religion, philosophy, law, politics, society and economics. Clearly it is expansive rather than reductionist, inclusive rather exclusive. The criticism of literature began with Marx and Engels, who offered analyses of the novels of Balzac and Eugène Sue, among others. Engels in particular pondered becoming a writer of poetry and stories, having penned some incisive pieces in his youth. He also regularly contributed to literary reviews and knew his Bible very well indeed. He was the one who first proposed the revolutionary nature of early Christianity, as well as offering the first materialist study of the Peasant Revolution, with Thomas Müntzer as its theologian of the revolution. After this impetus, Marxist literary criticism developed and grew, whether among Western Marxists (the focus of this book) or Eastern and Southern Marxists. No reputable Marxist did not offer some observations on literature (Lenin and Mao comes to mind, but there were many others). In the living memory of some, the flowering of Marxism in the 1970s saw a wave of newer approaches to Marxist literary criticism, building on more than a century of earlier work. But this period has now been eclipsed by the wealth of Marxist literary criticism in the last decade. Biblical criticism has benefitted from these earlier works

and this latest phase, and I hope this book may provide a guide to these developments.

Touchstones

Marxism does not provide a set and ossified method for interpreting texts, or indeed for studying the human experience in all its richness. Instead, I suggest that it comprises a set of problems or questions that are perpetually under debate. Those debates ensure the continuing liveliness and possibility of new insights that Marxism provides. So in this section I outline some of those questions, both for the assistance of those less familiar with Marxist approaches and for the purpose of indicating the issues that form the substance of the textual analyses that follow. Of course, I take certain positions in those debates, but these positions may always be questioned.

The issues might be listed as follows: the central role of dialectics; the interrelation between subjective and objective factors; the dialectics of base and superstructure; ideology and its role in understanding of culture, literature and aesthetics; social class and class conflict; economic history and the concept of mode of production, particularly as that has a bearing on the interpretation of ancient documents and on the dynamics of history, with one aim being the relativizing of the mode under which they all have done and do their work, capitalism.[2] Each of the writers from whom I draw methodological insights – Althusser, Gramsci, Deleuze and Guattari, Eagleton, Lefebvre, Lukács, Adorno, Bloch, Negri, Jameson and Benjamin – debates some or all of these problems with specific reference to questions of literature and culture. Indeed, in most cases there is a distinct method, or at least cluster of questions, that arises from their own particular positions.

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[2] For more detail on each of these core items, along with the full range of questions within Marxist research, see the earlier dictionary edited by Bottomore and the ongoing multi-volume *Historisch-Kritische Wörterbuch des Marxismus*. Tom Bottomore (ed.), *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); Wolfgang Fritz Haug and Frigga Haug (eds), *Historisch-Kritische Wörterbuch des Marxismus* (Berlin: Argument Verlag, 1996–).

Dialectics

> My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite … With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.[3]

In this text, Marx indicates both the origin of his dialectical analysis in Hegel and the way he transforms it in light of his materialist position. For Hegel, the dialectic is not – as the popular caricature would have it – a wooden process of moving from thesis to antithesis, which then enables a synthesis. Instead, it is a constant process of dwelling on a term's opposition, pushing it so that the term breaks down and gives rise to a new situation, which then develops its own dialectic. The opposition may arise from the fission or split of one item into two, such as the state, which turns out to be a result of the irresolvable conflict of social forces (or classes). Alternatively, the dialectic may be a clarification of a multitude of different items. For example, a society may have all manner of groupings – artisans, merchants, tax collectors, priests, royal functionaries, peasants, estate labourers, day labourers and so on – but they distil into two classes, a ruling class and a class that is ruled. I have already moved into the materialist version of the dialectic, in which real, flesh-and-blood forces come into conflict with one another. In Hegel's version, it was abstract ideas that were the initial point of reference. He spoke of the state, constitution, political life, primogeniture, political estates, social estates, bureaucracy, executive and monarch, and then he attempted to fit actual human beings into these abstract categories. How does Marx stand Hegel on his head? He begins with social life and then explores how these abstractions arise from that life.

For the interpretation of texts, a dialectical approach pays attention to the root meaning of the word. In classical Greek, *dialektike* (going back to Plato) is the art of philosophical argument,

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[3] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. I* (vol. 35, *Marx and Engels Collected Works*; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1867 [1996]), p. 19. This famous text appears in the afterword of the 1873 edition of Marx's *Capital*, although it is an image he used repeatedly since the early 1840s.

beginning with contrary positions through which one then argues. In other words, it assumes oppositions, conflicts, which in Marx's hands are eventually revealed as conflicts at a social and economic level. For interpreting texts, one seeks the basic contradictions, which may take various forms. In the chapters that follow, dialectical analysis appears, among others, in the analysis of Moses in Exodus, especially in terms of hegemony and its perpetual process of being undermined, in the discussion of genre in the books of Kings, where two genres come into conflict, in the class struggles of the book of Ruth, and in the tension between transcendence and immanence in the book of Job.

Subjective and objective

> An isolated individual could no more have property in land than he could speak … If the objective conditions of his labour are presupposed as belonging to him, he himself is subjectively presupposed as belonging to a community, through which his relationship to the land is mediated.[4]

Marxist criticism is often caricatured by the slogan, 'history is on our side'. Having determined the iron laws of history, or so the story goes, the phases of human development will follow one another in strict succession. Thus, primitive communism is followed by slavery, and then feudalism, capitalism and socialism. Each shift is generated by an internal contradiction between social and economic forces, thereby providing the breakdown of the old order and the ushering in of the new. The origin of this caricature is not clear, but it is certainly not from Marx himself. Instead, Marx notes astutely, 'circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances'.[5] In other words, the relation between objective and

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[4] Karl Marx, *Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft of 1857–58) [First Instalment]* (vol. 28, *Marx and Engels Collected Works*; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1857–8 [1987]), p. 409.

[5] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology: Critique of Modern German Philosophy According to Its Representatives Feuerbach, B. Bauer and Stirner, and of German Socialism According to Its Various Prophets* (vol. 5, *Marx and Engels Collected Works*; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1845–6 [1976]), p. 54.

subjective forces operates in terms of dialectics. The circumstances of social and historical life may produce the types of human beings of a given epoch, but those circumstances are the product of subjective human agency. Indeed, the very possibility of those circumstances is the result of human intervention. For example, Lenin knew full well that a communist revolution would not happen without direct revolutionary intervention. The situation may have been ripe (the devastation of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5 and then of the First World War, along with disastrous and brutal economic policies by the Tsarist autocracy), but socialism would not follow without revolutionary effort to create the conditions for such a society.[6] This dialectic of subjective and objective has a bearing on subsequent categories of Marxist analysis, especially those of base and superstructure, as well as class and economic history.

Base and superstructure

> But we must initially separate the figuration of the terms base and superstructure … from the type of efficacity or causal law it supposed to imply. Überbau and *Basis*, for example, which so often suggest to people a house and its foundations, seem in fact to have been railroad terminology and to have designated the rolling stock and rails respectively.[7]

One of the most debated problems of Marxist analysis is that of the connections between base and superstructure. Obviously, this is a metaphor, but the terminology of the metaphor may give the impression of a building with its foundations and then the walls and roof constructed upon those foundations. Instead, the metaphor in German owes more to railways and rolling stock – a rather more dynamic image than the static one of a building. But what does base and superstructure designate? A diagram is helpful:

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[6] As another example, consider the futile debate over nature and nurture in relation to the upbringing of a child. What the debate neglects is that the conditions of nature are those created by human intervention (nurture).

[7] Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, the Persistence of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 1990), p. 46.

		culture
		ideology
	superstructure	legal system
		political structures and state
mode of		
production	----------	----------
		mediation: relations of production (social class)
	base	
		forces of production (technology, ecology and population)

I have used this diagram here since it displays the complexity of the relationship between base and superstructure. The base concerns economic features, especially matters such as technology, the extent and skills of the population and the possibilities provided by nature.[8] The superstructure is not simply the realm of ideas and beliefs, but involves those features without which human beings would be unable to function. The whole realm of culture is here, as well as ideology (see the next section), political forms and the law (both customary and codified). However, the crucial term is the one that mediates between base and superstructure: the relations of production. These relations concern human beings, the way they relate to one another in the processes of production. In the social and economic context of the Bible, that production was overwhelmingly in terms of agriculture: 90–5 per cent of the relatively sparse population was engaged in agriculture, mostly of a subsistence–survival form. This fact of economic life had a profound effect on the way people lived in that world they had created, and thereby on the stories they told and the literature that was eventually written.

The diagram above also enables me to address a recurrent criticism of Marxist analysis, namely, that it is reductionist. That is, it supposedly reduces everything down to the 'ultimately determining instance' of the base, or economics. This is but another

[8] Here may be found the roots of Marxist ecological concerns, embodied most recently in eco–socialism.

sign of the ignorance of Marxist literary theory in biblical studies, for Marxist approaches enable the opposite, namely the inclusion of a host of questions normally excluded or compartmentalized in biblical studies. What I mean is that Marxism includes questions of literary form and content, of the detailed analysis of texts, in conjunction with wider issues of thought and belief, especially of a religious kind in regard to the Bible, of society and social interaction and conflict, of history, politics and economics, to name but a few. It is anything but reductionist, as the following chapters will make clear.

Ideology

> Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.[9]

One feature of the diagram – ideology – has generated an inordinate amount of debate and misunderstanding. I mean not its place in the relations between base and superstructure, but in the negative sense that the word bears. 'Ideological' usually has associations of partisanship, of being zealous for a cause and not working in an objective, scholarly (the Europeans would say 'scientific') manner. It is often used as a term of denigration or dismissal. Thus, she may be 'ideological', you may have 'opinions', but I have justified 'positions'. In biblical criticism, ideology often stands as a code for theology, which itself means that one lets one's religious beliefs intrude upon and thereby distort one's analysis. This usage is yet again a caricature of Marxist analysis, emphasizing one element and thereby distorting the very meaning of ideology.

To set the story straight: ideology has two senses in the Marxist tradition. The first is a 'critical' sense, whereby ideology designates a false consciousness, a mistaken view of a problem, if not of the world. We may believe that the world is flat, that the sun orbits around the Earth, or that climate change is a result of sunspots, or perhaps deny that it is happening at all (and is not a result of capitalist industrial activity). Such false consciousness needs to be

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[9] Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (trans. Ben Brewster; New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001 [1971]), p. 162.

corrected, through facts and persuasion to change one's mistaken beliefs. In Marx's case, and with many of those who followed in his footsteps, false consciousness was very much the ruling ideas, which were invariably the ideas of the ruling class. These then become internalized by all as a hegemony, so that most believe, for instance, that some people are naturally subservient workers and others natural rulers and exploiters, or that men are superior to women, or that some ethnicities are superior to others. It is easy to see how this sense of ideology – as false consciousness – may be extrapolated to become the complete meaning of ideology.

However, there is a second sense of the term, a 'descriptive' one.[10] In this sense, ideology is an inescapable part of human social existence, the means by which we are able to function in the world. Elements of this understanding are found in Marx's writings, but it was Lenin who developed it most fully. He spoke of the need to develop an ideology of the party, of class ideology, of various political ideologies. And in the hands of Louis Althusser (whom we will meet in the first chapter), it is both absolutely necessary and what may be called a meta-category. That is, ideology is not merely the way we negotiate our lives in relation to the social and economic whole; ideology is the way that negotiation is represented – in texts, narratives, myths, philosophy and indeed any cultural product. The relevance for interpreting biblical texts should be obvious by now, except that I would stress the need for keeping both senses of ideology in mind – the critical and the descriptive – in any deployment of what is known as *Ideologiekritik*.

Class and class conflict

> The wealth of the rich is their fortress;
> the poverty of the poor is their ruin. (Prov. 10.14)

A further feature of the diagram provided earlier is that of the relations of production, or the question of class. Not only is this the crucial point of mediation in the relations between base

[10] Michèle Barrett, *The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), pp. 18–34; Louis Dupré, *Marx's Social Critique of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 238–44.

and superstructure, but it is also an excellent example of the dialectic of subjective and objective factors in Marxist analysis. A succinct definition: class has both objective and subjective dimensions.[11] Objectively, class is determined by access to and control over the means of production, as well as location in the division of labour.[12] This division happens first along gender lines, although this is initially a ruling-class phenomenon, since among exploited peasants labour was much more of a shared phenomenon (due to the chronic shortage of labour that characterized life in ancient Southwest Asia). Typically, the control over the means of production appears in the form of gatekeeping: those who control the means of production determine who can and who cannot engage in productive activity. The paradox is that it is precisely the controllers who are no longer engaged in productive labour, preferring to exploit others who are so engaged. The subjective dimension involves a consciousness of belonging to a particular class. That consciousness includes a complex web of cultural assumptions, modes of speech, social codes, world outlook and religion. Most significantly, class consciousness is determined by a class opponent, the differences with which are marked by opposing assumptions of one's role and importance within production, and by the cultural assumptions each holds. For instance, peasants regard the class that extracts their produce, whether through taxes or direct appropriation (plunder), as exploitative and cruel, while those who exploit regard peasants as ignorant, lazy, earthy, uncultured and surly. In ancient Southwest Asia, in many cases a sharp distinction was made (mostly in legal texts) between what they called people partaking in the community and those under perpetual patriarchal authority. Here is an actual consciousness

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[11] Broadly, two approaches to class are dominant in biblical criticism, one derived from Weber and the other from Marx. One may readily distinguish between the two as follows: if a discussion of class multiplies the various levels of class with status as a factor, it tends to be inspired by Weber (often mediated via Gerhard Lenski into biblical criticism); if these multitudinous groups coalesce into two key classes in conflict with one another, the approach is more Marxist.

[12] This is a standard and accepted Marxist definition of class. For a specific statement, among many, see Igor M. Diakonoff, 'Socio-Economic Classes in Babylonia and the Babylonian Concept of Social Stratification', *Gesellschaftsklassen im Alten Zweistromland und in den angrenzenden Gebieten* (Dietz Otto Edzard (ed.); Munich: Beck, 1972), pp. 41–52 (42).

of class, albeit from the small ruling class and its functionaries. They themselves are of course the ones who are part of the community, while the rest are under their authority. The latter are subservient and not full members of the community; yet they are the vast majority (up to 95 per cent) of rural labourers in village communities, the indentured estate labourers who worked the palatine estates (for the sake of supplying food and materials to the non–labouring ruling class), and slaves.[13]

Lest we think that this is a benign, smooth and linear process, Diakonoff reminds us of the violence and brutal complexity of class society:

> The formation of a class society … does not mean that a society releases the best organizers, the most profound thinkers, and the most outstanding artists from production work. It is not those who are best capable of utilizing the surplus of produce in the most rational way who acquire it. It is, rather, those who are in a position to do so: individuals who possess resources of sheer physical strength or who have the daring or the armed or the ideological power; it is they who appropriate the organizational power. Most of these individuals exploit the labor of others without thereby benefiting society as a whole.[14]

What is the relevance of class for interpreting biblical texts? The obvious point is that the texts are the products of that small fraction of the ruling class known as scribes. However, it would be a mistake to assume that they simply parrot the consciousness

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[13] It is worth noting here that the state is the product of class conflict and not, as is so often assumed, an imposition upon people from outside. Instead, the state is 'a product and a manifestation of the *irreconcilability* of class antagonisms': V. I. Lenin, 'The State and Revolution', *Collected Works* (vol. 25; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1917 [1964]), pp. 385–497 (387). Note carefully: the state is therefore not a reconciliation of such antagonism, a means of mediating and ameliorating conflict within acceptable limits. It is a signal that 'antagonism objectively *cannot* be reconciled' (ibid.). The converse is also true, for the very fact that a state exists indicates that class conflict is irreconcilable.

[14] Igor M. Diakonoff, 'General Outline of the First Period of the History of the Ancient World and the Problem of the Ways of Development', *Early Antiquity* (Igor M. Diakonoff and Philip L. Kohl (eds); Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 27–66 (35).

of that class, although that is often the case (as with Proverbs). Instead, these texts tend to reveal the contradictions of ruling-class ideology. Such contradictions emerge in terms of stories that show the danger of and punishment for rebellion ('sin'), yet in the very process of constructing such stories these scribes preserve the mechanisms of rebellion. We find it in the 'disobedience' of the first human beings in Genesis 3, in the constant theme of murmuring in the wilderness stories of Exodus-Deuteronomy and so on. We also find contradictions in the way ruling-class hegemony is constantly asserted, since the need to reiterate that hegemony indicates that it is quite unstable (the later chapter on Gramsci is a case in point). Above all, the voices of the exploited class are most often silent, for by and large they have not left their texts to us. Yet, they are constantly present in what may be called an 'absent cause': many texts simply cannot be understood without the reality of exploited peasant life, a reality that is precisely the main cause of textual production because it is absent. I will explore this dialectical reality of the texts in many of the analyses that follow.

Mode of production

The final item from the diagram I produced earlier is that of mode of production. In its narrow sense, mode of production is an economic category, designating the distinct ways in which a social formation is structured to produce and consume the necessary (food, clothing, shelter) and luxury (whatever else) items of human existence. But mode of production also has a wider, inclusive sense, designating the way a whole system is structured and operates. It is, in other words, an inclusive term that involves (as the diagram indicates) the distinct but related realms of economy, society, politics, law, culture and ideology, but also matters of gender, ethnicity, sexuality and religion. Mode of production is thereby a particular way of understanding every dimension of human existence.

A distinct advantage of the category of mode of production is that it provides what I call a narrative of difference. It answers the question as to why human social formations appear so distinct over time and place. The reason is that human beings construct different modes of production in different epochs. They do so

in response to the shortcomings and contradictions of an earlier mode of production. An excellent example is the shift from the mode of production characteristic of ancient Southwest Asia (a 'sacred economy'[15]) to that of the slave–based mode of production of the Greeks and then the Romans in the first millennium BCE. Yet, the dialectical point to be borne in mind is that each mode of production is both enabled and restricted by its effort at overcoming earlier contradictions. This means that certain possibilities are enabled by a mode of production (increase in population through food production or technological innovation), but others are closed down (limits to technology and population). Eventually, the contradictions of a mode of production lead to it breaking apart, contradictions that usually show up as class conflict.

The upshot of this narrative of difference is that it enables us to understand to some extent how different the social, economic and cultural systems of antiquity are from the one that we know (capitalism). This awareness should make us wary indeed of imposing categories from our own mode of production to ones that are very different, and that includes the texts produced in those foreign modes. In other words, mode of production is also a hermeneutical category: what does it mean to undertake analysis from one mode of production (capitalism) of an ancient text like the Bible that comes from one or more very different modes of production?

Synopsis

Since this book is directed at those seeking an introduction to Marxist approaches to the Bible, I have structured each chapter as follows: it begins with a brief introduction to the key ideas of each thinker; then it shows how those ideas may be used to interpret a biblical text; it closes with a summary of the argument. Here I would like to offer an overview of the main arguments of each chapter, in order to provide a foretaste of what is to come, and to allow those who do not wish to read everything at once a chance to pick and choose. I focus on one Marxist critic in each chapter,

[15] Roland Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015).

drawing on key interpretative ideas for the sake of analyzing a specific biblical text. In regard to Althusser, I discuss his theory of ideology and ideological state apparatuses in order to interpret Genesis 25. From Gramsci I am interested in his treatment of Machiavelli and the notion of hegemony in order to read Exodus 32. Deleuze and Guattari add further complexity by indicating how the modes of resistance are multiple. In this case, I am interested in their interpretation of the scapegoat ritual in Leviticus. Eagleton's work on class, gender and ethnicity enables an interpretation of Ruth, whereas Lefebvre's study of the production of space provides me with a distinct angle on 1 Samuel 1–2. Lukács' discussions of genre I bring to bear on the structure of the books of Kings, and then Adorno's immanent dialectical criticism is the basis for reading Isaiah 5. Bloch's discernment of myth and the ability to discern oppositional voices enables me to trace the protest 'atheism' of Ezekiel 20. Negri's arresting interpretation of Job draws on his idea of constituent resistance, in which power (in this case, God) constantly has to adapt to the centrality of resistance. Jameson's treatment of the ideology of form gives me an angle on the study of the Psalms, and Benjamin's reflections on allegory and language enable an interpretation of Daniel 7–12.

In Chapter 1, I focus on Louis Althusser's most famous essay, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)'.[16] As the title suggests, Althusser's concern is the category of ideology, although he seeks to develop the descriptive dimension of that category (see the distinction between critical and descriptive approaches above). The items I wish to draw from Althusser and apply to the book of Genesis are as follows: a) ideologies function within the context of the material reality of institutions, which he calls repressive and ideological state apparatuses; b) two of the most important apparatuses are the family and religion; c) these state apparatuses are crucial for ensuring the perpetuation of ideologies that secure the perpetuation of the socio-economic system, or mode of production; d) they are also the sites of profound ideological conflict and tension, where opposing ideologies continually work against each other. Since written texts and other cultural products are prime sites of ideology, the application

[16] Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, pp. 121–73.

of his methods has become very common in literary and cultural theory. With these tools in hand, I set out to analyze the book of Genesis, seeking to answer the question as to why family or clan narratives dominate that book – running through from Adam and Eve to Jacob and Joseph. Why is this ideological state apparatus crucial, along with religion? But that is only the initial step, for I also pick up Althusser's emphasis on the fact that ideological state apparatuses are sites of profound tension. In this case, the tension may be found at the very core of the state apparatus of the clan. Its function is to give 'birth' to a people, a state, with repeated promises to one patriarch after another. Yet that people, which would become a state, is perpetually delayed. That is, if family and religion are crucial aspects of the 'state', why is Israel's emergence as a 'state' held back? This tension comes to a head with Genesis 25, where the maternal body of Rebekah becomes the site of the contradictory effort to bring about the 'birth' of Israel.

The second chapter turns to Antonio Gramsci, not least because his category of hegemony may be seen as another dimension of the development of the category of ideology. For Gramsci, hegemony is not merely the ideas of the ruling class, which thereby become the ruling ideas of an age. Instead, hegemony is always a contested zone. The ruling hegemony is characteristically unstable, needing constant reassertion in the face of an alternative hegemony that attempts to undermine and overthrow that ruling hegemony. I deploy this understanding of hegemony to interpret the figure of Moses and the oppositions he faces throughout the book of Genesis. Thus, the stories of revolt become crucial, for they indicate both a textual nervousness concerning the uniformity of an ideological position, but also a more complex strategy of incorporating opposition within such an ideology. These tensions show up most sharply in the story of the golden calf in Exodus 32.

In the third chapter, I draw some insights from the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. In particular, my focus is their fascinating account of the scapegoat ritual of Leviticus 16, in 'On Several Regimes of Signs' from *A Thousand Plateaus*.[17] Drawing

[17] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (trans. Brian Massumi; London: Athlone Press, 1988 [1980]), pp. 111–30.

upon Marxism, psychoanalysis and semiotics, they thoroughly recast each of these approaches in their unique and creative fashion. I begin by clarifying some terminology, especially the 'post-signifying regime', which is embodied in the scapegoat and the escapees led by Moses (for the two are intimately connected). A further category is the 'signifying régime', which is none other than the eternal state. Against this state, with its despot and occult priesthood, the scapegoat and the escapees become one mode of resistance to the oppressive state. Indeed, the state itself could not be understood without that resistance, so much so that the resistance itself is the crucial item.

For biblical critics, the rather accessible Terry Eagleton is quite well-known. His work is the concern of Chapter 4, with a focus on matters of class, gender and ethnicity – or, rather, the way literature develops various strategies to efface the presence of these factors. Drawing upon his studies in *The Rape of Clarissa* and 'Heathcliff and the Great Hunger',[18] I suggest that Eagleton's approach ensures that neither gender nor class nor ethnicity is the dominant form to the exclusion of the others. He does so in a way that is more fruitful than the recent fashion of 'intersectionality'. In applying Eagleton's approach to the book of Ruth, I argue that matters of class, gender and ethnicity actually provide an ideological solution to the problem of succession. The outcome is quite pernicious, for the ruling class becomes the Israelites, and Ruth's foreignness, gender and class status all contribute to her co-optation and effacement in the text. In other words, we arrive at the dialectical conclusion that it is precisely in texts featuring women that gender is avoided: a text like Ruth functions to remove women from the story by the very means of making them central to the story.

Henri Lefebvre is the source of insights in Chapter 5. Like many of the critics who make an appearance in this book, Lefebvre worked in a whole range of areas, such as Marxist activism, philosophy, urban and rural sociology, geography, emergent cultural studies, but he is most well-known for his work on the production of space

[18] Terry Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982); Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London: Verso, 1995), pp. 1–26.

and the importance of everyday life. Note that it is the *production* of space, for space is not a given that human beings then negotiate. Instead, within each mode of production, human beings produce space in surprisingly different ways.[19] Lefebvre identifies three ways in which space may be constructed, moving from the overt policies of planners to the covert patterns of resistant space (his famous 'spaces of representation'). For this reason, in my textual analysis I sidestep the more obvious spatial texts, such as the tabernacle or temple instructions in Exodus, 1 Kings, 1 Chronicles or Ezekiel, or the distribution of land in Joshua. Instead, I focus on 1 Samuel 1–2, a somewhat inconspicuous text that also enables me to draw upon Lefebvre's lifelong concern with everyday life. In particular, the opposition between the overt space of the shrine at Shiloh is in tension with the covert womb of Hannah. However, in a series of dialectical moves I argue that the shrine at Shiloh is itself marginal in comparison to Jerusalem, which then becomes marginalized in comparison to the imperial centre of Babylon or Egypt.

In Chapter 6 I turn to Georg Lukács, literary critic, philosopher, political commentator and activist. What interests me is not only Lukács's exercise of the dialectic, but also some key ideas concerning literature. Lukács's literary work assumes as its starting point the dialectical fact of contradiction and tension, which leads him to locate such literary tensions in relation to those at a socio-economic level. Typically, he identifies the way literature tends to respond to and attempts to solve – at an ideological level – the profound changes underway within and between modes of production. In this light, my specific concern is with two of Lukács' works, *Theory of the Novel* and *The Historical Novel*,[20] particularly his discussion of the dialectical tensions between genres. I seek to apply this approach to the books of Kings, where I offer a reading of the tension between prophetic and royal narratives. I

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[19] As an example from our own day, one has only to compare the spatial features that persist in the 'former' communist countries of Eastern Europe, or indeed present-day China and Vietnam, with the busy trashiness of capitalist productions of space.

[20] Georg Lukács, *Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (trans. Anna Bostock; Cambridge: MIT, 1971 [1920]); Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (trans. Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983 [1937]).

trace the tensions in these narratives between the prophetic material that dominates in 1 Kings 17–2 Kings 9.10 and the narratives about kings that dominate the remaining material. Focusing on the questions of narrative rhythm, life and death and characterization, I close by asking what is going on with the strange ideological world of Kings, specifically in terms of mode of production.

Chapter 7 introduces Theodor Adorno, one of my favourite critics. Although Adorno made major contributions to musicology, philosophy, sociology, psychoanalysis and literary criticism, I am interested in his method of interpreting texts, namely an immanent dialectical criticism. Rather than importing criticisms from outside, this dialectical approach seeks the contradictions of the text through its own narrative patterns and conceptual arrangement. For Adorno, the most rigorous critique is one that emerges from the text under analysis. The example I provide is his critique of Kierkegaard.[21] In this light I consider Isaiah 5, the so-called parable of the vineyard, arguing within the terms of the text itself that a series of paradoxes emerge – between the social criticism of the ruling classes and the conservative model of society envisioned, the love of the prophet for Yahweh and the justification for punishment, the responsibility of Yahweh for the 'sour grapes', and the complete ideological inversion of the theme of cultivation and wildness – that renders any connection between divine and social justice impossible.

Ernst Bloch, who appears in Chapter 8, actually used the Bible as one of his main sources for the concept of utopia.[22] Concerned to understand the importance of the Bible for the rural and urban working classes, Bloch's work is notable for the way his vocabulary and syntax are shaped by the Bible itself. A significant feature of his utopian hermeneutics is the search for buried and repressed traditions, in which Bloch traces the way the language of protest in the Bible has at heart the challenge against Yahweh as ruler and overlord; in other words, there is a deeper logic of protest against Yahweh in the Bible. In this light, I trace what may be called

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[21] Theodor W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* (trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989 [1933]).

[22] Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom* (trans. J. T. Swann; London: Verso, 2009 [1968]).

anti–Yahwism or even a protest 'atheism' in the texts of Ezekiel, especially Chapters 16, 23 and 20. This is particularly the case with 20.25–6, where Yahweh gives laws that are not good, that can only produce sin, ending with an enforced return from exile and obedience to the covenant.

The influence of Antonio Negri in Chapter 9 follows a slightly different line to many of the other chapters, for it draws directly upon Negri's interpretation of the book of Job.[23] He began the study while in prison in the early 1980s, as a way of coming to terms with the right-wing repression of organizations such as Autonomia Operaia Organizzata, of which he was a member – and because one of the few books he was permitted to read was the Bible. He completed his study of Job in Paris, after escaping there in 1983. Elsewhere, I have engaged at length with Negri's work, assessing it in terms of the long tradition of engagements between Marxism and religion. Here, however, I am interested in Negri's focus on the tension between chaos and order, which he reads as immeasure and measure, on the creative function of labour, and above all on the famous principle of *Operaismo* (workerism). This principle is drawn from Marx's argument that resistance does not respond to the ruling class, but rather that the ruling class is reactive, responding constantly to the active originality of the workers, peasants and other exploited classes. In terms of Job, this means that he is the one with the initiative, calling God to answer. The very fact that God does so at the end of the book is a signal of Job's ability to bend transcendence to immanence.

Fredric Jameson is the focus of the penultimate chapter. Engaging with a whole range of contemporary methods, from linguistics to architecture, film theory to Russian formalism, Jameson has carried on a programme that both incorporates these methods within Marxism and advocates Marxism's power as an interpretative and political method. He understands Marxism as a set of problems that require constant reworking, ever open to new developments while always holding to Marxism itself. In this case, my interest is in his continual concern with dialectical relations between form and content, with specific reference to the Psalms. I suggest

[23] Antonio Negri, *The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor* (trans. Matteo Mandarini; Durham: Duke University Press, 2009 [2002]).

that the Psalms as a collection may be divided into two major categories: those concerned with the content of the Psalms, whether in devotional, historical or thematic terms, and those concerned with form. The latter category has dominated Psalms research, in terms of form criticism and the effort to make some headway on the question of Hebrew poetry. However, we find that this focus follows the tendency of the text itself, for the structure of the collection seeks to organize the Psalms into five books, or as the psalms of David, the sons of Korah, Asaph, Solomon or Moses, or in terms of 'musical' directions, or even aligning some of them to moments in the life of David. This tendency is what may be called an overdetermination of form, so much so that contradictions start to appear. My analysis uses the semiotic square to ask what the problem with the Psalms may be. Is the form a compensation for the content? Does the overtly 'sacred' language exhibit its shortcomings or emptiness most clearly in the language of worship and devotion?

In the final chapter I deal with Walter Benjamin. Like Bloch, Benjamin referred to the Bible extensively in his work, although I am interested in his work on allegory and language. The specific question that I seek to apply to biblical analysis is that concerning the tension between the overt political use of language and the blockages to such use. I trace a similar tension in the apocalyptic material of Daniel. Working with Daniel 7–12, a contradiction appears between the allusive and metaphorical language of the vision and a desire both by the text and subsequent scholars to fix the references in this material to particular historical events and times. Drawing on Benjamin, I argue against this tendency, for apocalyptic language is anti-referential, a closed system from a very different socio-economic system that is finally undecipherable. However, the dialectical point is that such an anti-referential function is marked by the precise effort to make the referential move. This also poses a question for Benjamin, for whom allegory provided an alternative opening to the future blocked by history: is the effort by apocalyptic language to imagine a different future foreclosed by the nature of that language itself?

The focus on major Marxist critics and the sampling of texts from one end of the Hebrew Bible to the other serves an introductory function with a critical bent, for I want to argue for the viability of Marxist literary criticism in biblical studies across a range of texts.

The result is series of studies that form some of the pieces of what may be termed the ideological structures of the dominant modes of production under which the Hebrew Bible was written. However, while I think it is futile to offer yet further hypotheses concerning authorship and dating, I do not believe that we should abandon the question of history. In Marxist terms, history functions at many levels, although the most insightful and fecund is that of mode of production. So in the conclusion, I draw together the various observations on mode of production throughout the book, locating them within the framework of the dominant mode of production of the time. This I call the 'sacred economy', and I provide a summary of my recent book-length study of this economy.[24]

[24] Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*.

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Louis Althusser: The difficult birth of Israel in Genesis

For a time in the 1960s and 1970s Louis Althusser was the central figure of the intellectual left, first in France and then internationally. Through a host of literary critics, such as Pierre Macherey, Terry Eagleton and Fredric Jameson, his work in philosophy made its way into literary and cultural criticism. Althusser's work remains deeply influential today across a wide range of disciplines and among many activists. My focus here is with a particular essay, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)',[1] from which I draw out some of the main points in order to interpret the book of Genesis, especially Chapter 25. These points include: the definition of ideology, and the crucial roles of religion, family, state and culture, which he thoroughly reinterprets as ideological state apparatuses (ISAs). In applying these items to Genesis, I am interested in how the various ISAs in that text deal with profound tensions in the patterns of selection and deselection, in the perpetual delay in forming a people and thereby a state, and especially in the way these issues are concentrated in a tension between the barrenness and fecundity of Rebekah's womb.

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[1] Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (trans. Ben Brewster; New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001 [1971]), pp. 127–86; Louis Althusser, *Sur la Reproduction* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995), pp. 269–314.

Ideology

Althusser provides one of the most thorough reformulations of the Marxist category of ideology. Up until this point, the tradition had distinguished between 'critical' and 'descriptive' approaches to ideology, with the critical sense designating a specific false consciousness that has to be overcome, and the descriptive sense indicating the inescapable and indeed eternal nature of ideology for social existence. Thus, a critical approach identifies a perception of the world that is mistaken and needs correcting – that the world is flat, that the sun revolves around the earth, or that climate change does not exist or is at most not the result of human activity. But Marxism goes a step further and points out that such ideologies also function to perpetuate exploitation and oppression – that the ruling class is wise and has worked hard for its wealth, that the poor are so because they are lazy and stupid, that refugees take jobs and drain the welfare system and that bourgeois democracy is inherently good. All these and more function to conceal or mystify the real nature of exploitation; so a strategy of ideology critique was needed to demystify such ideologies, to uncover the techniques by which they operate. Once they were revealed, then the real causes of exploitation could be unmasked and an effort made to overcome them.

By contrast, a descriptive approach sees ideology as a vital necessity. Human beings cannot avoid developing ways to account for their place within the vastness of history, which is itself beyond comprehension. More specifically, each group, political organization, or class, develops narratives that express their view of the world and their role within it. Although this descriptive sense of ideology may be found in the texts of Marx and Engels, Lenin was the first to speak of such ideology. For Lenin, the Bolsheviks needed to develop what he called an ideology in the lead-up to the Russian Revolution. This he understood as their platform, one that was constantly in the process of being worked out through open and frank struggle, and one to which anyone who joined the Bolsheviks had to adhere. With this development, ideology can therefore apply to class consciousness, to religious groups, to ethnic groups, even to nations. Obviously, this is a more positive understanding of ideology, although one may easily see that the negative, critical sense may also be contained with a descriptive approach. One's political opponents and class enemies thereby develop wrong

ideologies which they attempt to foist on all and sundry and must therefore be countered.

Althusser's intervention in this tradition served to lift the traditional understanding of ideology to a whole new level. The key argument is contained in four proposals: ideology has no history; ideology is a 'representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence; ideology has a material existence; ideology interpellates individuals as subjects. Each of these is relevant for my reading of Genesis, although I will deal with them here in a slightly different order.

No history

To begin with, ideology itself is ahistorical. Whereas individual ideologies have histories, ideology in general has no history: 'if eternal means, not transcendent to all (temporal) history, but omnipresent, trans-historical and therefore immutable in form throughout the extent of history, I shall adopt Freud's expression word for word, and write ideology is eternal, exactly like the unconscious'.[2] Always with us, ideology is as much a part of communist society as of biblical societies.

Interpellation

In order to explain this a little further, let me turn to his fourth proposal concerning ideology – ideology interpellates individuals as subjects (the meaning of 'interpellate' will become clear in a moment). This thesis is an effort to deal with the question of the subject, of how we are constituted as conscious subjects. The two crucial terms are ideology and subject, for between them a dialectical relation operates: ideology requires subjects to function, but creating subjects is the function of ideology.[3] But how is the subject constituted? Here Althusser tells a story:

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[2] Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, p. 161.

[3] While the subject as a category is absolutely necessary for all ideology, 'the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of "constituting" concrete individuals as subjects': *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, p. 171.

> I shall then suggest that ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'
>
> Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn around. By this one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a subject. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was 'really' addressed to him, and 'that it was really him who was hailed' (and not someone else). Experience shows that the practical telecommunication of hailing is such that they hardly ever miss their man: verbal call or whistle, the one hailed always recognizes that it is really him who is being hailed. And yet it is a strange phenomenon, and one which cannot be explained solely by 'guilt feelings', despite the large numbers who 'have something on their consciences'.[4]

Althusser is keen to stress that the narrative sequence gives a false before-and-after effect. The process is simultaneous and perpetually repeated. That is, individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects, and so individuals are always-already subjects.

However, what interests me for my reading of Genesis is the way the often forgotten religious 'example' that follows in Althusser's text is crucial to the argument.[5] How does (religious) ideology hail an individual? For Althusser, it calls a particular person, who, created by God, must respond to this call. God speaks to this person through the Bible and Church, and if this subject responds to the law of love, then he or she is committed to the cause, may be granted eternal life and so on (Althusser's example is the hailing of Moses by Yahweh at the burning bush[6]). In other words, the formal structure of all ideology is the same, and since religious

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[4] Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, p. 174.

[5] For a full treatment of the neglected role of theology in Althusser's thought, especially in light of his early theological writings, see Roland Boer, *Criticism of Heaven: On Marxism and Theology* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2009 [2007]).

[6] Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, p. 179.

ideology has both multiple subjects, a single Subject (God) and a relationship posited between the two, he argues that all ideology has the following features: the interpellation of individuals as subjects; subjection to the Subject (God in this case, but it may also be a political cause, a state, a class); the mutual recognition of subjects and Subject, the subjects' recognition of each other and the subject's recognition of him or herself; the absolute guarantee that everything is really so. Once all four factors are in play, subjects recognize the existing state of affairs and operate within them. All of which leads Althusser to his final formulation: 'the individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection'.[7] We will see later how this final formulation by Althusser is directly relevant for understanding the function of God in the text of Genesis.

Representation, imaginary relations and real conditions of existence

Thus far I have dealt with two of Althusser's proposals concerning ideology. Next I would like to pick up the thesis that ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. This is perhaps the most significant contribution by Althusser to the understanding of ideology, so some patience is required to make its meaning clear. The key to this definition is that there are three levels in ideology: real conditions of existence; the imaginary relationship to these conditions; the representation of this imaginary relationship. To put it differently, ideology is at two removes from the real conditions.

Why? Althusser wants to counter the assumption that ideology is an imaginary way of conceiving one's real conditions of existence. This is a half-baked sense of ideology, one that remains at the second or intermediate level (that of imaginary relationships). With this criticism, Althusser has in his sights the critical approach to ideology I mentioned earlier, in which ideology is an illusion behind which reality hides. Interpretation is then supposed

[7] Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, p. 182.

to identify the reality (through allusions) and overturn the illusion. Even more, Althusser seeks to counter the assumption that such ideology is produced either by cynical rulers (despots, priests and so on) who deliberately construct lies in order to fool the people, or is the response to alienation, in which an alternate world is constructed as a way of coping with such alienation (this is the position of none other than Ludwig Feuerbach and the young Marx).

I would like to pause for a moment and ask what the implications are for biblical criticism. Often biblical scholars assume that if a text is produced by a religious and scribal elite it will give expression to the ideological assumptions of that group: priests thereby produce documents with priestly concerns, men write texts with male interests, political groups will put forward their own propaganda. The problem is that when material appears in the Bible that goes against such assumptions, then a number of strategies are deployed. An older option was to posit different theological agendas for different sources – in Genesis these were the sources J, E, P and D – so that we end up with differing and overlaid perspectives. Another option has been to argue for competing political groups with different agendas: these perspectives then appear as contested voices in the same text. By contrast, if we take up Althusser's arguments, then ideology is not the product of a clique, a group of ideological manipulators who seek to dupe their opponents and the masses into following them. Instead, ideology is the way these activities are represented. In Althusser's words:

> It is not their real conditions of existence, their real world, that 'men' 'represent to themselves' in ideology but above all it is their relation to those conditions of existence which is represented to them there. It is this relation which is at the centre of every ideological, i.e. imaginary, representation of the real world.[8]

Is this not a statement of how the Bible itself works? It represents the efforts by human beings to tell stories about their relationship to the real conditions of their lives.

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[8] Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, p. 164.

One proposal concerning ideology remains: ideologies have a material existence. Ideology as such may be eternal, a feature of all human existence; it may constitute human beings as subjects; it may be a representation of the imaginary relationship to real existence. But specific ideologies are grounded materially and historically. The way they do so is through ideological state apparatuses.

Ideological state apparatuses

On this matter, Althusser develops the distinction between the repressive and ideological state apparatuses (taking up some hints from Gramsci).[9] The RSA is singular, comprising the elements of police, courts, prisons, army, head of state, government and administration, and it operates by means of violence and its threat. Ideology plays a role here, although in a minor key to direct repression. By contrast, the ISAs appear as institutions, and their distinct characteristic is their predominantly ideological function, one that is contradictory and constantly contested. Although the RSAs and ISAs work together in subtle ways, his attention is squarely on the latter. He distinguishes between the following ISAs, although he admits to finding the religious, educational and family ISAs the most interesting.

- the religious ISA (the system of the different Churches)
- the educational ISA (the system of the different public and private schools)
- the family ISA
- the legal ISA
- the political ISA (the political system, including the different parties)
- the trade-union ISA

[9] They form part of Althusser's wholesale effort to deal with the Marxist question of base and superstructure (see the Introduction). Not only do repressive and ideological state apparatuses have both material and ideological dimensions, but they are also semi-autonomous, having their own dynamics and influencing other dimensions of the base and superstructure in their own way.

- the communications ISA (press, radio and television, etc.)
- the cultural ISA (literature, the arts, sports etc.).[10]

Three dimensions of the ISAs are important for my reading of Genesis. First, even though they are disparate, the various ISAs can be unified when they operate under the ruling ideology, which is (to gloss Marx and Engels) the ideology of the ruling class: 'no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatus'.[11] Second, since the ISAs are not directly repressive, the ruling class faces a continual struggle to assert its ideological dominance. The ISAs are then both the stake and site of class struggle, for those opposed to the ruling ideology wage their battles to undermine this ideology precisely in the ISAs. And that means that they are inherently unstable, with continual threats posed to a shaky hegemony of the ruling class.

Third, a singular ISA often becomes the locus of the tensest struggles. Althusser provides the example of the Church in the Middle Ages, for it held under its sway the ISAs of education, communications, culture and family. Such power enabled the Church to remain dominant for century upon century. At the same time, its pre-eminence meant that it was the site of the most intense struggles. Here the bourgeoisie fought long and hard, eventually wresting each ISA away from the Church and making education the dominant ISA of the capitalist era. Or is it the family that is most important? In his later and creative autobiography, entitled *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, Althusser writes: 'It is an irrefutable fact that the Family is the most powerful ideological State apparatus.'[12] Why the change? As he came to reflect on his earlier life, he realized with some alarm that the family's power and dominance enables it to instil in a child a combination of fear, respect, timidity and guilt, all for the sake of learning respect for absolute authority and the State. No paeans to the family as an indispensable pillar of society here; indeed, he preferred the relative peace and freedom of of his

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[10] Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, p. 143.
[11] Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, p. 146.
[12] Louis Althusser, *The Future Lasts a Long Time* (Olivier Corpet and Yann Moulier Boutang (eds), trans. Richard Veasey; London: Vintage, 1994), p. 105.

time in the prisoner of war camp during the Second World War: 'I was free from that most frightful, appalling, and horrifying of all the ideological State apparatuses, in a nation where the State exists, namely the family.'[13]

I have no need to enter into debate over such a matter, for my purposes are somewhat different. In my critical use of Althusser for reading Genesis, I draw upon his terminology of the ISAs, particularly the family and religious apparatuses, their entwined dynamic, inherent contradictions and their relation to the state. But that is only one aspect of my interpretation of Genesis, for I will deploy Althusser to ask questions not only about the narratives of the text, but also about the status of the text itself. In other words, the text is an ideological product, an item that emerges from culture (the cultural ISA, although that is part of the religious ISA in Genesis). Thus, ideology works at two levels, one concerning the nature of the text itself, and the other concerning the narratives it tells. In both respects, I am interested not only in the material reality of ideology (in the ISAs), but also in the definition of ideology as interpellation, as the representation of the imaginary relations to real conditions of existence.

The difficult birth of Israel

Genesis as a whole is riven with contradictions, ranging from repetitions such as Seth's birth (Gen. 4.25–6; 5.3) and the wife-sister stories (Gen. 12.10–20; 20; 26) to themes of barrenness, usurpation of birth-rights, tensions between twins, deception, thwarted child-sacrifice and particularly the problems around women giving birth. Rather than being a mark of alternative ideological positions (whether sources and editors, or ideological contests between different political groups), I suggest that these tensions signal the normal function of ideology. As I indicated in my treatment of Althusser, one expects tensions and contradictions to appear in any ideological product. More specifically, these ideological tensions are precisely the result of the ruling ideology

[13] Althusser, *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, p. 104.

that dominates Genesis, for any ruling ideology perpetually faces the contradictions of its own position. In Genesis, the core of this ruling ideology is a dual one. It concerns the possession of land and women, manifested in the infamous 'promise' to Abram of progeny and land, but also in the various stories of creation (Gen. 1, 2–3, 6–8, 9), genealogies and family narratives.

But let me focus on Genesis 25 and Rebekah, where and in whom many of the issues in the whole text of Genesis are concentrated.[14] For the sake of my analysis, three narrative features stand out. The first concerns the ISAs of religion and kinship. Thus, in the same way that Genesis 25 is concerned with the children of Keturah, the *toledot* of Ishmael and Isaac, and the story of Rebekah giving birth to Esau and Jacob, so also in the whole book do kinship interactions dominate the narratives: Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel and Seth; Noah and his sons; Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Keturah, Isaac, Ishmael and Keturah's sons; Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Esau; Jacob, Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, Zilpah and their 13 children (including Dinah); Joseph, Asenath, Ephraim and Manasseh; Judah, Tamar, Perez and Zerah. Although genealogies appear elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, such as Numbers and Chronicles, the marked difference of Genesis from other narrative texts is the predominance of the clan narratives that interleave the genealogies. For these reasons, I use Althusser's designation of the

[14] Critics often seem to ignore the importance of Genesis 25 and the role that Rebekah plays: Athalya Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Genesis* (vol. 2, The Feminist Companion to the Bible; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993); Athalya Brenner (ed.), *Genesis* (vol. 1, A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series); Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998); Mark Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 82–3; Fokkelien Van Dijk-Hemmes, *The Double Voice of Her Desire* (Leiderdorp: Deo, 2004). Those who do comment on the passage are inexorably drawn by the narrative to the struggle between Jacob and Esau: Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis* (London: SCM, 1972), pp. 164–8; Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), pp. 127–30; Ilona Rashkow, *Taboo or Not Taboo: Sexuality and Family in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), pp. 121–5. Only Calvin and Brodie, almost five centuries apart, note the importance of Rebekah: John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis. Volume Second* (trans. John King; Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1850), pp. 42–3; Thomas L. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, and Theological Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 115, 281–2.

family ideological state apparatus as a key feature of the narrative of Genesis.

Second, Genesis 25 is inconceivable without the presence of Yahweh, for he is the one that opens Rebekah's womb, responds to her question, politicizes her womb – in short, exercises rigid control over the narrative. Looking wider than Chapter 25, none of the narratives can operate without Yahweh's clout. At a purely textual level, then, it is possible to speak of a religious ideological dominance in the text, one that, using Althusser's terminology, is part of the religious ideological state apparatus. I will plot this in more detail in the analysis that follows, as also with the family. So we already have an overlay of two ideological systems, two institutional forms of speaking that generate a host of contradictions.

A third major narrative feature is what Althusser calls the 'state'. At the risk of covering some obvious points, by using *état*, Althusser assumes any formation of a group of people with institutions for government. In this sense, it is possible to speak of an Israelite state, but I need to emphasize that, as with the religious and family ISAs, such a state is a literary item, an element in the narrative with no immediate connection to any substantive state of Israel.[15] Here, Althusser's definition of ideology comes into play, for the appearance of family, religion and state remains a representation of an imaginary relationship to real conditions of existence.

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[15] The terms used are *goi*, *'am* and *l'om*, of which the first two are the most common: *goi* in Gen. 10.5, 20, 31, 32; 12.2; 14.1, 9; 15.14; 17.4, 5, 6, 16, 20; 18.18; 20.4; 21.13, 18; 22.18; 25.23; 26.4; 35.11; 46.3; 47.18; 48.19, and *'am* in Gen. 11.6; 14.16; 17.16; 19.4; 23.7, 11, 12, 13; 26.10, 11; 27.29; 28.3; 32.7; 33.15; 34.16, 22; 35.6; 41.40, 55; 42.6; 47.21, 23; 48.4, 19; 49.10, 16, 29; 50.20. By Exodus, however, *'am* dominates, referring to the Israel that has now appeared at a literary level. Rather than the misleading 'nation' – with echoes of the nation-states that arose after the French Revolution – I prefer 'people' for all three terms. What interests me in Genesis is the third term, *l'om* (people), which appears in Gen. 25.3 (*ule'ummim*); 25.23 and 27.29 (*le'ummim*); 25.24 (*ule'om* and *mile'om*) and *'ummah* (tribe) in Gen. 25.16 (*le'ummotam*). In my *Political Myth* I designated this literary construction a 'state in waiting', that is, one that is an imaginative creation that awaits its manifestation in material form. See Roland Boer, *Political Myth: On the Use and Abuse of Biblical Themes* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2009). Transliterations of Hebrew use the General Purpose Style.

Family

Delayed birth

For the sake of my discussion, I treat the religious and family ISAs as separate but significantly overlapping apparatuses, both dealing with the question of the 'state', or in Genesis 'people'. The tensions within the family and religious state apparatuses relate not only to each other, but also to the question of the people. And all three connect in the central question of the promise of a people that runs throughout Genesis: Yahweh or Elohim (religious) repeatedly makes promises to various figures that a people (state) will arise from a child, always a son (family), of the person in question. Yet already a contradiction arises with this promise: Israel as a people does not appear in Genesis despite the repeated promise. The birth, in other words, is delayed.

This delay in the appearance of Israel as a people is in stark contrast to the continual emergence of a whole slate of peoples other than Israel. These often, although not exclusively, appear in the various genealogies that intersperse the narratives. Thus, Genesis 25 begins with two different genealogies (25.1–4, 12–16) and seems to begin a third (Gen. 25.19) which then shifts into the birth story of Rebekah. The first is that of Keturah, Abraham's wife, who bears a series of children. Even though Keturah, not Abraham, is the subject of the verb, it follows the standard formula for when a woman gives birth: she bore for him (see, for instance, Gen. 21.2). The list of names follows a distinct format that appears throughout Genesis, namely, a combination of places, peoples and those with no clear identifier: Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midiam, Ishbak and Shua; from Jokshan, Sheba and Dedan; from Dedan, Asshurim, Letushim and Leummim; from Midian, Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abidah and Eldah. At a certain point, the list moves from individuals to plurals – Asshurim, Letushim and Leummim. Western eyes weary of such lists all too quickly, preferring to skim them and move with relief to the next narrative stretch. Yet, doing so misses signs of the weariness of the list with itself: having run out of names, it simply throws out *le'ummim*, 'peoples'. I would suggest that this – the propagation of peoples – may be read as the inevitable outcome of every line but that of the promised one. Thus, in the genealogy of Genesis 25.1–4, the children born of

Keturah are not of the promised line, so it seems that they can flourish. The same applies to the sons of Abraham's concubines (note the plural; Gen. 25.6), for they were sent east, far from the relatively barren line that runs through Isaac.

A similar pattern follows with Ishmael, although in this case the tensions are exacerbated – between promise and lack of promise, between fulfilment and unfulfilment. It all begins with the strange genealogy of Ishmael. The genealogy opens in familiar enough fashion: both Genesis 25.12 and 25.19 begin with 'These are the *toledot* of Ishmael / Isaac son of Abraham'. Now they bifurcate: whereas Genesis 25.19 goes on to say 'Abraham bore Isaac', Genesis 25.12 has 'whom Hagar, the Egyptian, Sarah's maid, bore to Abraham'. Here the contrast is sharp: in Isaac's case (Gen. 25.19), male begets male without mediation by a female; in Ishmael's case (Gen. 25.12), the birth is mediated through a woman weighed down with epithets. The effect is to generate significant syntactical distance between Abraham and Ishmael. The contrast between the two genealogical formulae is the signal of a tension. Ishmael is also the subject of a promise, and so this text may read as the fulfilment of that promise. At the same time, it creates a distance between the two recipients of the promise, between Isaac and Ishmael. Even more, the text stumbles as it proceeds. Three times it states, in slightly varying form, that 'these are the *toledot* of Ishmael' (Gen. 25.12), 'these are names of the sons of Ishmael' (Gen. 25.13) and 'these are the sons of Ishmael' (Gen. 25.16). Each has a slightly different function, the first introductory, the second before a list of names itself and the third in a summarizing fashion, but the effect is one of formal overload, a repetition that gives away an ideological tension. For in Ishmael the promise is fulfilled, but the paradox here is that this seems to be the mark, no matter how close he gets, of not being chosen by Yahweh. The paradoxical sign of that lack of true election is precisely that Ishmael becomes the progenitor of a people. Thus, the names that appear in Genesis 25.13 are eponymous; Ishmael has become a *goi*, as verse 16 makes clear in an echo of Genesis 10.5, 20 and 31. 'These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names, according to their settlements and their encampments, twelve princes according to their tribes' (Gen. 25.16). Here is the full panoply of 12 tribes with their princes. So, as with Keturah in Genesis 25.1–4, Ishmael's line unfolds into a *goi* and even the

apparatus of a 'state' – settlements, encampments, princes and tribes.

Ishmael therefore exhibits multiple tensions in the text. He is the recipient of a promise of a people, but the actual fulfilment of that promise is the sign that he is not really chosen. Comparable moments appear throughout Genesis, where peoples seem to flourish, except Israel, except the chosen line: Cain's descendants in Genesis 4.17–22; those of Shem, Ham and Japheth in Genesis 10. In each case, the names are often personal names, toponyms and eponyms rolled into one. And the result is a narrative overflowing with peoples in their territories and cities, germinating in riotous fashion, through which the unproductive line of promise wanders its weary way, almost celibate in the singular (or serial) genealogies of Genesis 5.3–32 and 11.10–29. In fact, the text is at pains to point out that what we have here is a comprehensive listing in terms of 'their families, their languages, their lands and their peoples' (10.20, 31; see also 10.5, 32; compare Gen. 25.16).

So also in Genesis 25: in contrast to the flourishing of both Keturah and Ishmael, the select line that runs through Isaac and Rebekah seems paradoxically blessed by its sparseness and troubles. In particular, the pairing of Ishmael and Isaac in Genesis 25 highlights the ambiguities of the promise as well as foreshadowing the struggling twins in Rebekah's womb. But it is a feature that has oft been commented upon in Genesis: Cain and Abel, Abraham and Nahor, Abraham and Lot, Hagar and Sarah, Esau and Jacob, Leah and Rachel, Perez and Zerah, Ephraim and Manasseh.[16] In particular, Isaac is the subject of five promises to Abram/Abraham, pumped up each time in a nervous reiteration of chronic unfulfilment (Gen. 12.1–3; 13.14–17; 15.1–18; 17.1–21; 22.16–18). Even more, Ishmael is the subject of two promises to Abraham (Gen. 17.20; 21.13) and two to Hagar (Gen. 16.10; 21.18). All of which comes together in Genesis 25 with Ishmael and Isaac compared, acting together to bury Abraham, and then separated.

[16] Heard calls this a tension between selection and diselection. R. C. Heard, *Dynamics of Diselection: Ambiguity in Genesis 12–26 and Ethnic Boundaries in Post–Exilic Judah* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001).

Promise

Ishmael is curiously the recipient of a promise and yet not. Moving outside Genesis 25, we find that the story of Hagar, Sarah's double, also has the text playing with the promise. Thus, Hagar is the recipient of a promise comparable to that of Abram, although without the land component (Gen. 16.10; 21.18); Abraham himself receives a promise of a *goi* through Ishmael, again without the land as an item (Gen. 17.20; 21.13), and this promise is fulfilled in Genesis 25.12–18. Here the pseudo-promise to Ishmael bears fruit in a people, whereas the passage that immediately follows has Isaac and Rebekah in a notable lack of fulfilment. Even though the Ishmael material comes closest to realizing the promise to Abraham, so much so that Genesis 21.13 confirms this as part of the promise, it veers away at the last moment, for only one line is the correct one, and the others, no matter how close, are not. The same applies to Esau, son of Isaac and Rebekah but not the favoured one, from whom the Edomites come (Gen. 36).

What of the promise regarding Isaac, whose sons Rebekah brings forth from her womb with great difficulty? The narrative about Abram in Genesis 12 begins with a promise that involves both land and people:

> Take yourself from your land, from your relatives/descendants (*moladteka*) and from your father's house to the land that I show you. And I will make you a great people (*goi*) and I will bless you and make your name great and a blessing will happen. I will bless those who bless you and those who curse you I will bind with a curse, and all the clans of the earth will wish themselves blessed like you. (Gen. 12.1–3)

I would like to emphasize a number of items in this passage. The word *moladteka* (from *yld*) is ambiguous, for it can register both relatives and descendants. The usual translation is 'relatives', since it seems to make sense in the immediate context of Abram's departure, but the ambiguity with descendants should be retained, for it is precisely the question of descendants that is at stake in the promise itself. Second, the promise concerns land, the generation of a people (*goi*) and blessing: of Abram's name, of the other families through him. Not only does the tension with Genesis 11.30 lock into place,

but another tension also appears. How is it that the other 'clans' (*mishpekhot*) of the earth will wish themselves blessed when they have by and large already appeared on the scene, while the *goi* that is the fruit of Abram's loins lies over a distant horizon? As I have indicated, this is a major tension in Genesis, between the delayed *goi* of Israel and all the *goiim* who seem to multiply unimpeded in their lands. If the blessing to Abram involves both land and people, then it would seem that the other peoples have pre-empted the blessing of which Abram will be a somewhat tardy recipient. The Abram narratives return time and again to the promise with which the cycle begins (Gen. 13.14–17; 15.1–18; 17.1–21; 22.16–18). The detail and length of these versions only draws attention to their lack of fulfilment, exacerbated by Abraham's scepticism.[17]

What we find, then, in the narratives in Genesis 25 is a significant tension between the incessant production of peoples, or *goiim*, from the testicles of anyone who is not part of the line that will lead to Israel, no matter how close he might come (Ishmael, Esau and so on). The tension surrounding the 'state' in Genesis, namely the *goi*, or as it will appear with great frequency in Exodus and beyond, *'am*, of Israel, is that the promise of an innumerably great *goi* is delayed for the whole of the text. The sheer repetition of the promise exacerbates the delay, and yet everyone else has no problem in becoming peoples, that is, in realizing the promise that is so difficult for Israel. The key item in this is Ishmael, for unlike the other eponymous ancestors, both Hagar and Abraham receive a promise for him that bears fruit within the text of Genesis, in distinct contrast to that of Isaac.

Womb

Thus far I have concentrated on two features – the tensions in the delayed birth of Israel and in the promise – of the family ISA in Genesis. Yet, both of these are concentrated in a third item of that ISA, namely, Rebekah's barren womb. Thus, the delayed birth of Israel as a people becomes the barrenness of her womb, and the

[17] The incessant repetition of the promise to Abraham recurs with subsequent figures: Isaac (Gen. 26.3–5, 24), Jacob (Gen. 28.13–15; 35.11–13; 46.3), and then through Jacob to Joseph, although God does not speak directly to Joseph (Gen. 48.4, 16). Of course, this promise too is chronically delayed.

paradoxical curse enfolded within the promise becomes divine appropriation of her procreative functions. In other words, her womb is where the ideological and political struggles of both the family and religious ISAs are contained in a microcosm. Her womb is the very place where Israel struggles to be born. In order to trace the workings of these tensions, I need to engage in some detail with the text of Genesis 25.

Like Sarah before her (Gen. 11.30; 16.1), and after her Rachel (29.31) and Leah (30.9), Rebekah is barren. Not only does this narrative device highlight the direct appropriation by Yahweh of birth processes (see also 20.17–18), but it also functions as an ideological device that signals the delay of the birth of Israel. Indeed, we may read the status of her womb as a trope of a barren narrative, for it too seems unable to give birth to a *goi* named Israel. I would also suggest that barrenness is itself a mark of selection and promise, which then itself becomes more a curse than a blessing in Genesis.

After Yahweh grants Isaac's prayer to open her womb, Rebekah becomes pregnant (Gen. 25.21) and there follows a narrative of struggle in birth that differs from the others in Genesis in a number of ways. Those that are born as twins appear only here and in Genesis 38 with Perez and Zerah. Yet, Perez and Zerah take little part in the narrative, whereas Esau and Jacob become central. Indeed, since Esau and Jacob are patronyms for Edom and a much delayed Israel, Rebekah's womb becomes a site for political struggle. One would expect nothing less when reading in light of Althusser's method, for an ISA is primarily a site of struggle, both ideological and political. It may simultaneously seek to provide ideological justification for the state itself and to undermine the workings of that state, depending on who has achieved dominance for a time.

In this way should we understand the backhanded promise of Yahweh in Genesis 25.23: 'And Yahweh said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger".' It is a promise of struggle, simultaneously bodily and political, for its focus is Rebekah's womb.[18] Or rather, her womb is

[18] While Skinner is content to focus on Jacob and Esau at the expense of Rebekah, he usefully notes the mythologically analogous Greek tale of Akrisios and Proitus,

a distinctly political item, a site of political struggle. On this matter, it is worth noting the range of terms used for womb in the text: 'the sons struggled together in her body (*beqirbah*)' (25.22); 'two peoples are in your womb (*bebitnek*), and two peoples from your insides (*mimme'ayik*) shall be divided' (25.23); 'and when her days for giving birth were full, behold, there were twins in her womb (*bevitnak*)' (Gen. 25.24). Three terms appear, one repeated: *qerev* (inward parts, body), *beten* (womb, belly) and *me'im* (entrails, body, womb). Although each term bears other senses in different contexts (relating mostly to men and animals), womb is also very much part of their semantic fields. However, my interest is the way in which a whole panoply of terms for body, insides and womb focus their semantic fields on the sense of womb.[19] That is, even the semantic fields indicates the concentration on womb, enhancing its function in the family ISA. And is not *Rivekah*, Rebekah, a play on *qirbah*, her body (Gen. 25.22) – another addition to a text full of creative and ultimately false etymologies?

Yet, I suggest that this concentration on her womb indicates not a focus of textual and ideological attention, but rather a nervousness. I mean that such attention is actually a sign of the instability of the ideological apparatus at precisely this point. How so? Even physiological features of pregnancy and birth take on political features: the bodily changes and pains of pregnancy become the mutual oppression or struggle (25.22) of political units, and the birth process itself is but a manifestation of those politics. In fact, Rebekah's womb becomes the site for a heavy investment for everything else in Genesis: the political future of conflict, divine utterances and the possibility of the people of Israel. Even the attribution to Abraham of a womb, or at least child-bearing entrails in Genesis 15.4 ('he shall come forth from your body,' using *mimme'ayik*, from *me'im*) gives way to a narrative such as this where the womb becomes a site of political, ideological and

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sons of Abas, king of Argos, and even – in a moment of mythological universalism – the Polynesian story of Tangaroa and Rongo. John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (The International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1910), p. 359.

[19] Rashkow suggests that *bebitnek* and *mimme'ayik* are less usual terms that stress the pain and suffering of Rebekah. Rashkow, *Taboo or Not Taboo: Sexuality and Family in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 122.

religious contestation. And Yahweh, the one responsible for the repeated attempts at creation in Genesis 1–11, cannot ensure the delayed arrival of Israel without the womb of Rebekah, or for that matter of Sarah or Rachel or Leah. In this light, the struggling sons, Jacob and Esau, now become the obvious outward markers of the nervousness surrounding Rebekah's womb that I have been emphasizing.

Ultimately, an ISA is an ideological apparatus of the state. But how does the state emerge in a text in which the state is apparently absent? Rebekah's troubled process of giving birth is for the sake of producing a people, who are to become a state – Israel (Jacob). That state is quite literally in embryo through Genesis 25, still awaiting its full realization. One further feature of the text illustrates my point quite well. This chapter contains a term for people that is found only here and in Genesis 27.29: *le'um* and its plural, *le'ummim*.[20] Elsewhere in Genesis *goi* and *'am* are preferred, but not in Genesis 25. Why is this significant? Consonantally, *le'um* is constructed out of the preposition *l* and the word for mother, *'m*, which may then be pointed differently. So it literally means 'for a mother', or in the plural 'for mothers'. In other words, the rare term *le'um* signals in another way the focus on Rebekah's womb as central to the family ISA. The people can come forth only through the womb of the mother, and here it is Rebekah's womb.[21]

Religion: Interpellation and imaginary relations

I have dwelt long with the family ISA of Genesis 25, although hints of the religious ISA have woven their way into that discussion.

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[20] The singular, *le'um*, appears twice in 25.23, and the plural in 25.23 and 25.3.

[21] Not only does the womb find echoes in the burial cave of Abraham and (earlier) Sarah (Gen. 25.7–11; see 23.19), but it draws together and envelopes dwelling, burial and bridal chamber in an extraordinary text: 'And Isaac brought her, Sarah his mother, into the tent and he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her. And Isaac was comforted after his mother' (Gen. 24.67). Assuming that 'Sarah his mother' is not a corruption, the text means that Isaac brings his dead mother and new woman into the same tent, to honour the former and have sex with the latter. Both women, of course, move from barrenness to fertility by the hand of Yahweh.

Most obviously, this takes place through divine efforts to control Rebekah's womb. The effect, however, is a curious threesome: Yahweh is intimately involved with both Isaac (whose prayer he answers in Gen. 25.21) and Rebekah (whose womb is opened). Nonetheless, divine birth control is but one element of the religious ISA of Genesis 25; another concerns what I described earlier as interpellation. That is, Rebekah is constituted as a subject through Yahweh's act of interpellation. Here she follows in the footsteps of the earlier recipients of the promise, which may now be read in terms of interpellation. Thus, the hailing or interpellation of Cain, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob constitutes them as subjects, although that subjectification is an ambivalent one: they become ancestors of a people whose arrival is always over the horizon.

Yet, Rebekah's interpellation differs from these other instances (and draws closer to Hagar). The key text here is Genesis 25.22, where Rebekah rather than Yahweh speaks first. Directed at no one in particular, she asks: 'If so, why then I?' (*'im-ken lammah zeh 'anoki*). The question is extraordinarily cryptic, to say the least.[22] That it is spoken by a woman in a text notorious for silencing women in relation to men only adds to its intrigue.[23] However, I would like to read it in terms of subjectification (with Althusser peering over my shoulder): why then I? The personal pronoun is held back until the final moment of the question. What constitutes Rebekah as a subject in this narrative? Is it the sons fighting in her womb, or her function as child-bearer for Isaac? But then, in the only occurrence of a woman approaching God with a question in Genesis, the text mentions that she goes to inquire of Yahweh (Gen. 25.22). Yet the words of her inquiry do not appear, for Yahweh rushes in with an answer. Is the preceding question meant to be

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[22] Given his linguistic obsessions, Skinner laments that it is 'not quite intelligible', thereby missing the crucial role of this question: Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, p. 359. Alter, like Skinner, suggests it may be a broken-off sentence, 'Then why am I …? See Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary*, p. 127. While Yahweh's rush to answer may support such a point, it misses the moment of subjectification. Only Calvin dwells on this sentence, suggesting it is a wish to die due to Rebekah's forebodings concerning the struggle: Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis. Volume Second*, pp. 42–3.

[23] J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), pp. 120–30.

directed at Yahweh? Syntactically, it appears that Rebekah asks it of herself, and that Yahweh cannot be bothered listening, for she must be answered before she can speak too much. And the answer is the one I quoted earlier, the backhanded promise of struggling peoples in her womb.

At this moment of interpellation, when Yahweh addresses her, Rebekah is constituted as a subject through her political and religious role. As if to confirm Yahweh's dominance, the text reads, when her days for giving birth were fulfilled, 'behold, there were twins in her womb' (25.24). That is, Yahweh was correct, there are two, for up until this point the only signal of more than one was the plural 'sons' in 25.22. But, if we follow Althusser through, such a narrative gives the impression of a sequence, whereas ideologically the subject is always-already interpellated, always-already constituted. So far, so good, but I have not yet identified the specific relevance of Althusser's treatment of interpellation for this interpretation of Genesis 25. It appears with his 'religious example' at the close of the essay on ideological state apparatuses. Here one does not become a subject through some anonymous interpellation; the one who calls is none other than the Subject (capital 'S') and we are constituted as subjects in response. So also in Rebekah's case: she is not merely constituted as a subject, a distinctly political subject, by the interpellation of Yahweh, but it necessarily involves the subjection of Rebekah to the Subject himself, Yahweh. In this process, she recognizes her sons as subjects and thereby herself as a subject. Above all, the function of ideology is to provide a guarantee that it cannot be otherwise, and all Rebekah must do is acquiesce and all will be fine. In other words, Rebekah's constitution as a subject in subjection to Yahweh involves her complete absorption into the narrative of Israel's birth. As a woman who gives birth, she can do no other.

Now another dimension of Althusser's definition of ideology comes into play: as a text, this narrative is a representation of the imaginary relationship with real conditions of existence. This goes much further than the general point about genealogies and family narratives – that they reflect ideological concerns over coherence and kinship that is then projected backwards through eponymous figures and genealogical lines (a simple reflection theory of ideology) – to provide an important mediation. Genesis 25 is not itself the imaginary relationship to real conditions; that is,

it does not directly give voice to political and ideological questions. Rather, it is a representation of imaginary relationships. And those imaginary relationships, I would argue, are the way political, family and religious ways of constructing the world are trying to deal with the question of reproduction.

What about the real conditions? One might argue for a range of possible particular circumstances – the perpetual delay of Yahweh's political promises in a context (Babylonian? Persian?) of little promise – but this misses the value of a method like Althusser's. It seems that the real situation that constitutes the problem is the chronic problem of lack of labour in an economic system that may be characterized as subsistence–survival. With infant mortality rates at 50–60 per cent and a life expectancy of 30, labour and not land is the crucial issue. As I argue in *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*, a series of features make sense in the light of the question of able human beings to engage in agricultural labour. Laws stipulated efforts to bind labourers to palatine and temple estates, farmers often exercised their most effective weapon by simply leaving the land and taking to the hills if the burdens of labour, taxation and oppressive despots became too much, and fugitives were a constant issue in the correspondence between rulers. In the constant tension between palatine estates (constructed for the purpose of providing the necessary and luxury items for those who did not work, the unemployed ruling class) and the semi-autonomous village communities, the former would constantly draw labour from the latter in a way that threatened the viability of the village communities. In this light, the themes of barrenness and fertility of Rebekah's womb, the crucial efforts by Yahweh to control her womb, become efforts not merely to represent in this text the relations between human beings and their economic situation. Here too the themes of the delayed birth of Israel, the promise that seems to be a curse, the family narratives of Genesis, all become focused on Rebekah's ability to reproduce. That in itself is a representation of the problem of reproducing – physically, economically and ideologically – the mode of production itself. Yet, as Althusser would argue, in the representation itself all the tensions and contradictions show up, in terminology, grammar, syntax, speech and narrative.

Conclusion: The birth of Israel

In light of the fact that Genesis 25, especially the narrative about Rebekah's womb, intensifies many of the tensions found elsewhere in Genesis – between pairs, between the generation of peoples apart from Israel and the delay in the birth of Israel, between recipients of promise and those not, in the terminology for womb and people – I have argued that it is precisely her womb that becomes the key ideological element in this narrative. For here there is an intersection between the four major elements I have drawn from Althusser's work, namely, the family ISA, the religious ISA and the operation of ideology as both interpellation and the representation of the imaginary relations with real conditions. Rebekah's womb is the locus through which political 'states' will emerge, where the family narratives of Genesis reach a crux, and where Yahweh must control every aspect of the process of birth, from barrenness, through pregnancy and the struggle in the womb to the birth itself. In other words, the site of the greatest tension and struggle is precisely Rebekah's womb. Yet this is not the end of analysis, for that is in itself an ideological representation of the way people sought to deal with the pressing problem of the shortage of human beings who can labour. Rebekah's womb embodies in microcosm the question of economic reproduction.

How, finally, does the narrative resolve the problem of the birth of Israel in Genesis? It is only when we cross the boundary of books, between scrolls, that Israel may appear. In Exodus 1.7 that birth takes place in Egypt: 'But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.' Five verbs appear here, all dealing with the growth of Israel into a people, and in Exodus the vast number of the *'am*, people, signals their arrival. Paradoxically, it is only outside the land that is so much a part of the promise, in Egypt, that the promise of a people is fulfilled. The ambiguous promise of a land, one to be possessed and dominated, must wait much longer for its own fulfilment.

Summary

- Althusser argues that ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.
- Ideology has a concrete and contested existence in institutions, or ideological state apparatuses.
- The book of Genesis provides a paradox, in which the promise of a people to the mythical ancestors is perpetually delayed.
- That paradox is focused in the wombs of women, especially that of Rebekah.
- This is an ideological manifestation of the chronic shortage of labour that characterized life in ancient Southwest Asia.

2

Antonio Gramsci: The emergence of the 'Prince' in Exodus

Like Lenin and Mao, Antonio Gramsci lived as a politically active intellectual, with the impeccable credentials of dying at the hands of Mussolini's fascist regime. Apart from towering over the history of the left in Italy, he has had a profound influence in the way some newer disciplines conduct their work, particularly cultural studies and post-colonialism. But those with a slightly longer tradition than a decade or two have also dipped into Gramsci's legacy – sociology, philosophy, political science, literary criticism and feminism. Alongside his deepening of the Marxist categories of ideology and class consciousness in terms of hegemony, Gramsci also contributed to understanding the role of intellectuals, ideology, the state, politics, civil society, philosophy of praxis, reformation and revolution. It is one of the ironies of Gramsci's great body of literature that had it not been for his imprisonment he would not have been able to carry out such a huge intellectual project, nor would he have been killed off by an exponential multiplication of diseases and ailments. From July 1926 until his death on 27 April 1937, at the age of 46, Gramsci was a political prisoner.[1]

[1] For the last two days of his life, he was cynically freed by Mussolini. Too sick to move, he soon died.

Moved from prison to prison, the right to write was finally granted early in 1929. For the next eight years he wrote, in cell after cell, constructing the extraordinary prison notebooks and communicating with his family – Julia Schucht and their children, Delio and Guilio, resident in the Soviet Union.[2]

In what follows, I outline the key ideas I wish to draw from Gramsci in order to reinterpret the story of Moses. More specifically, I read the figure of Moses in Exodus in terms of Gramsci's reflections on Machiavelli's *The Prince*.[3] Taking up Machiavelli's own admiration for Moses as the epitome of the ideal ruler, as well as Fontana's suggestion that the interaction with Machiavelli provided many of the concepts that Gramsci himself was developing,[4] it seems to me that there is more than a passing acquaintance between Exodus and Gramsci's work. Behind the main work of theoretical and textual reading, there lurks also the question of the nature of Exodus, and the whole Pentateuch, as a political myth, a foundational political document that can only be written in mythical form. Moses attracts to himself two specific areas of Gramsci's writings – those concerned with the state and ideology. Not only do we find the literary construction of a 'state', an *'am* that is finally born after the boundary with Genesis (and the promised land) has been breached, but also distinct signs of ideological conflict, for which Gramsci deployed a term he encountered among the Russian Bolsheviks: *egemonia*, hegemony. Always a contested zone, the stories of revolt or opposition in Exodus become crucial, for they indicate not merely a textual nervousness about the uniformity of an ideological position, but also a more complex strategy of incorporating opposition within

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[2] For a detailed engagement with Gramsci and religion, see Roland Boer, *Criticism of Heaven: The Author's Cut* (Taipei: CCLM Publishing, 2012), pp. 335–419. The authoritative study of Garmsci's work as a whole is now Peter D. Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2010 [2009]).

[3] Antonio Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings* (trans. Louis Marks; New York: International Publishers, 1957); Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[4] Benedetto Fontana, *Hegemony and Power: On the Relation Between Gramsci and Machiavelli* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

such an ideology. For this reason the key text will be the story of the Golden Calf in Exodus 32.

The Prince

Rather than discuss Gramsci's thought in the absence of the text he exegetes – Machiavelli's *The Prince* – I prefer to discuss both, with constant reference to Moses. In this section, I begin with Gramsci's argument, identifying the themes of myth, the fictional nature of the Prince, collective will and moral and intellectual reform. From there, I turn to Machiavelli's own text, seeking the reasons why the Prince in Gramsci's hands seems at many levels a description of the biblical Moses. Finally, I return to Gramsci to outline his crucial theory of hegemony.

Myth, fiction, collectivities and reform

Gramsci observes of *The Prince*: 'The fundamental characteristic of *The Prince* is that it is not a systematic treatment, but a "living" book, in which political ideology and political science are fused in the dramatic form of a "myth".'[5] The almost scriptural invocation of the living book takes a turn towards political myth, for this is precisely why it is such a book, full of breath and pulse and vitality. Do I speak of *The Prince* or the Bible? Both, I would suggest, for the continuing power of a text such as Exodus – in fact the whole stretch from Genesis to Joshua – is as a political myth, one that fuses political ideology and political science, as well religion and ritual, social and familial organization; in short, that deals with the question of the state, whatever the particular details might turn out to be.[6] The key is the way Machiavelli draws everything together in the figure of the *condottiere*, the 'qualities, characteristic traits, duties, necessities of concrete person', who both represents the collective will and excites the 'artistic fantasy of those he wants

[5] Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, p. 135.

[6] Roland Boer, *Political Myth: On the Use and Abuse of Biblical Themes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

to convince and give a more concrete form to political passions'.[7] I cannot help noticing that Moses is partially concealed behind Machiavelli's ideal prince.

Yet there is a utopian dimension to *The Prince*, one that derives from his ideal nature:

> The utopian characteristic of The Prince lies in the fact that the Prince did not exist in historical reality, did not present himself to the Italian people in a directly objective way, but was a purely doctrinaire abstraction, the symbol of a leader, the ideal *condottiere*; but the emotional, mythical elements contained throughout this small book, with very effective dramatic movement, are recapitulated and come to life in the conclusion, the invocation of a 'really existing' prince.[8]

Although Machievalli was clearer about the identity of this 'really existing' prince (Lorenzo de' Medici), Gramsci does not mention his name. In other words, the one Machiavelli exhorts to be prince remains anonymous in Gramsci's text. So also with the unnamed biblical authors, for if there were a specific audience, a 'prince' that required exhortation to lift himself to the heights of Moses, then he also lacks identification. But this is part of the mythical and utopian function of both *The Prince* and Exodus. As for Machiavelli, he is for Gramsci a passionate partisan, who seeks to bring about new relations of forces, to work to what should be rather than what is. It is not a hopeless wishing or a 'yearning for the stars',[9] but rather a concrete will based on an analysis of effective reality.

Thus far I have considered the mythic status of the Prince and the fictional nature of the narrative. Now our concern is his collective and reforming roles. Gramsci is selective in applying Machiavelli's guidelines to what he calls the 'modern Prince', but there are two fundamental points from which any concrete suggestions may emerge. The first is the 'formation of a national-popular collective will of which the modern Prince is at the same time the

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[7] Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, p. 135.
[8] Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, p. 135.
[9] Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, p. 163.

organiser and active working expression'.[10] The prince's very status as a 'myth-prince' renders him the first sign of this new collective, which for Gramsci is the political party, but which for my purposes will be a people.[11] Just as the Prince is the means for establishing a new and unified Italian state, so also the party will produce the conditions for a socialist society, uniting the collective will of the proletariat. For Gramsci, in the same way that Machiavelli becomes, in the rousing conclusion to *The Prince*, the embodiment of the people to whom he has addressed his tract, a political myth such as this can only realize itself if it becomes the ideology, the drive behind and content of the political programme of the party.

The second basic point is the need for a reform of religion or world outlook, for which the modern Prince 'must and cannot but be the preacher and organiser of intellectual and moral reform'.[12] Not only does the phrase 'intellectual and moral reform' provide the basis for a national-popular collective will which desires a better and higher form of civilization, but it is also Gramsci's code for both the Reformation and revolution itself.[13] Is Moses a reformer or a revolutionary, or possibly both – in a way that brings together these opposed terms?

It is telling that in the mythic text of Exodus the 'state' or *'am*, of Israel, the *bene Yisrael*, emerges within the text at the same time that Moses rises to prominence. He is nothing other than the preacher and organizer of intellectual and moral reform – that is, as reformer and revolutionary – so necessary for the emergence of the collective will. I have no intention of returning to the old argument in biblical studies over the collective individual; rather, 'Moses' is the necessary precondition for the mythical emergence of the state, or *'am*, of Israel. In a way comparable to the connection forged between the new prince and the people through Machiavelli's new

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[10] Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, p. 140.

[11] In the bulk of his notes he applies Machiavelli's observations on his 'Prince' to the political party, especially the revolutionary Communist Party, 'that particular party which, at different times and in the different internal relations of the various nations, aims (and is rationally and historically founded for this end) to found a new type of State'. Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, p. 146.

[12] Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, p. 139.

[13] Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* (trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg and Antonio Callari, vol. 1; New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 142, 213, 243–4.

knowledge – the people and the Prince come into being simultaneously through the new political knowledge – so also Moses can emerge only with the people of Israel by means of the mythical narrative of Exodus.

Machiavelli

Thus far I have outlined some of the ways in which Gramsci's reading of *The Prince* – as political myth, the fictional nature of the Prince, the concern with collective will and moral and intellectual reform – applies to the role of Moses in Exodus and the books that follow. Now I would like to turn to Machiaelli's own text, *The Prince*. The reason is that it reveals a closer fit between Moses and the legendary prince than we may at first have anticipated. Why? For Machiavelli, Moses is one of the prime models for the Prince himself.

Along with Cyrus, Romulus and Theseus, Moses is a leading example of one who has come to be ruler through his own ability (*virtú*) rather than through luck or fortune (*fortuna*).[14] Indeed, Moses is the first exemplar of those 'new principalities acquired by one's own arms and ability'.[15] Such acquisition is of the highest order, compared with reasons of inheritance, ecclesial privilege, crime or even election by one's fellow citizens. Each may be viable, but only the first reveals the true character of its new leader. So Moses is at the head of a list of rulers of the most desirable form of the state, a new principality, acquired by his own ability, fortune and arms.

Further, Moses made the most of both his great ability and the opportunity presented him, finding the people of Israel ready to follow him out of servitude to the Egyptians. In fact, the Israelites had to be enslaved in order to reveal Moses' ability.[16] The difficult part is attaining power, but it is held easily when this hurdle is

[14] Machiavelli had at least one forerunner for the generic argument that Moses reveals the skills of a true leader, for Philo and Josephus had also attempted such arguments, albeit rather sanitized. Scott M. Langston, *Exodus Through the Centuries* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 172, 233–4.
[15] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 19.
[16] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 88.

overcome. Another factor, which will be important in my reading of Exodus 32, is that the opponents of innovation are often stronger than the lukewarm enthusiasm of the prince's supporters. Thus, the struggle becomes even more intense, and the opponents of change will attack vigorously whenever possible, throwing the prince and his supporters into danger.

Given such a situation, armed supporters are absolutely necessary. Machiavelli is scornful of mercenaries and auxiliaries, stressing the need for an army comprised of one's own men, for only these soldiers will remain firm in battle. Thus, the 'armed prophet'[17] – Moses is directly in mind – is always more successful. Why? Force is always required against one's external enemies, but also against those within, especially when they murmur and rebel, no longer believing in one's schemes. For the prince of a new principality, then, the dangers and difficulties are immense, but when the long haul of attaining power and instituting reform is over, rulers like Moses become secure, honoured and successful. At the close of the work, Moses returns in the impassioned call to Lorenzo de' Medici to become a new prince by following Machiavelli's precepts. Italy, writes Machiavelli, is in desperate straits, 'more enslaved than the Hebrews',[18] and it is in this situation that one with ability could unite Italy to become a great state. In fact, there have been favourable events, 'signs from God': 'the sea has opened; a cloud has shown you the way; water has flowed from the rock; manna has rained down here.'[19]

What are the specific characteristics of the ideal prince? Not only have these given the adjective 'Machiavellian' its ambiguity, but they also function as a checklist for my reading of Exodus 32. A ruler should never (Chapter XVI) exhibit lavish generosity, for this will deplete his resources and force him to tax his subjects. Paradoxically, such generosity will lead to hatred. Rather, he should be miserly, for eventually people will see that he is really generous, always holding enough resources for war and other expenses without having to burden his subjects with taxes. The only exception is with what belongs to another: a ruler must be

[17] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 21.
[18] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 88.
[19] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 89.

generous with, for instance, loot and booty, but not with his own money, since 'meanness is one of those vices that enable him to rule'.[20]

Similarly with cruelty (Chapter XVII): proper mercy can be achieved only through cruelty. A little well-directed cruelty – the occasional beheading or imprisonment – is far more merciful than ill-thought clemency: 'by punishing a very few he will really be more merciful than those who over-indulgently permit disorders to develop, with resultant killings and plunderings.'[21] Machiavelli pushes the paradox: the ideal is a prudent and humane cruelty. Although it is best to be loved and feared, a ruler does much better by being feared rather than loved or indeed hated.

As for honouring his word, the ruler should set little store by this. Cunning deception, where required, is far better. Again, the reason is that people are treacherous and faithless; a ruler will fall foul if he does not exercise prudence. He should keep or break his word when it is to his advantage. With the guile and perceptiveness of a fox and the strength and force of a lion should a prince rule.[22]

With these principles in mind, Machiavelli offers direct advice in order to rule effectively. To begin with, the best rulers show all of the virtues – mercy, trustworthiness, humaneness, uprightness and devotion – even when circumstances require acting differently. The prince should at least 'seem' to have these virtues, he 'should not deviate from right conduct if possible, but be capable of entering upon the path of wrongdoing when this becomes necessary'.[23] This is the new virtue (*virtú*). Further, in order to avoid hatred and contempt, everyone must be kept respectful and content: 'Well-ordered states and wise rulers have always been very careful not to exasperate the nobles and also to satisfy the people and keep them contented; this is one of the most important things for a ruler to do.'[24] By displaying grandeur, courage, seriousness and strength, taking strong positions and steering clear of neutrality or vacillation, keeping a small circle of serious advisers and shunning flatterers, and avoiding the seizing of property and women, he will

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[20] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 57.
[21] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 58.
[22] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 61.
[23] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 62.
[24] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 66.

ensure that he is not hated or despised, for these are worth far more than fortresses built as a security against one's own people.

A purely Machiavellian reading of Moses is entirely possible, and part of what I undertake below may be seen in this way. But why did Gramsci find Machiavelli so appealing? What attracts him is not so much the opportunism, the Jesuitical means justifying the end, but the extraordinarily practical nature of the treatise. Thus, Machiavelli writes that it would be desirable if rulers displayed all the virtues, as so many had argued before him, but because he wants to focus on what is useful, 'it seems to me better to concentrate on what really happens rather than on theories or speculations'.[25] Since people are corrupt and unscrupulous, a ruler who wishes to maintain his power must be prepared to 'act immorally when this becomes necessary'.[26] And yet Gramsci can claim Machiavelli as the Italian Luther, one who provides the way to enact change in political economics as well as in moral and intellectual terms. Did not Luther himself say, when you sin, sin boldly? In the end, the appeal of Machiavelli is that he is not caught up in the past, reiterating what others before him had written: he offers a vigorous way forward and positive alternative that actually focuses on the *volgo*, the people.

For Gramsci, *The Prince* is misread as a treatise on morals: Machiavelli is a man of action who urges others to action. The book is therefore a 'manifesto', a work with revolutionary implications. Like Marxists, Machiavelli writes for those who are not accustomed to rule, especially newly emergent and politicized people who make up the citizen democracy. This new force requires an awareness of its own independent personality, which requires a break from traditional ideology. Couched in the language of practicality and action, full of details and examples, *The Prince* becomes an enabling ideological force, one that provides impetus to new political directions. Exodus too may be read, not without some qualifications, as a comparable revolutionary document – the emergence of a collective will out of the escape from slavery

[25] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 54.
[26] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 55.

– replete with its own precepts and laws, whether for the tabernacle or for living, that are to be read prescriptively rather than descriptively.

Hegemony

In light of the preceding discussion, my reading of Exodus moves backwards and forwards, from the works of Gramsci and Machiavelli to the Bible and then back again. But there is a further element, namely, hegemony (*egemonia*), a term Gramsci picked while in the USSR and then developed through interaction with Machiavelli. Gramsci's basic point concerning hegemony is twofold, determined by which class exercises hegemony. In the case of an aristocratic or bourgeois ruling class, it is inherently unstable, constantly under threat of subversion and collapse. Any effort at domination and control by a ruling class is bound to be uncertain and shaky, for it is always contested by those who are ruled. This is not the popular view of hegemony, in which the term designates the dominant position with little consideration for class difference.

However, a careful reading of the many treatments of hegemony in Gramsci's prison notebooks reveals that such an interpretation is superficial.[27] His formulation of the theory of hegemony was to find a way to overthrow those who oppress. As Peter Thomas puts it, 'hegemony is a particular practice of consolidating social forces and condensing them into political power on a mass basis'.[28] The prime purpose for Gramsci is both to forge a political hegemony (out of civil hegemony) so that the masses may seize state power, and then to consolidate power through the dictatorship of the proletariat and the united front.[29] Gramsci distinguishes between

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[27] Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 1; Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* (trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg, vol. 2; New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* (trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg, vol. 3; New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Fontana, *Hegemony and Power: On the Relation Between Gramsci and Machiavelli*; Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism*; Roland Boer, *Criticism of Heaven: On Marxism and Theology* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2009 [2007]), pp. 215–74.

[28] Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism*, p. 194.

[29] Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism*, pp. 159–241.

persuasion, which involves intellectual and moral leadership (*direzione*),[30] and domination or coercion (*dominio*), especially over antagonistic groups.[31] Who is the ideal person that embodies consent and force? It is none other than the armed prophet, for 'all armed prophets succeed whereas unarmed ones fail'.[32]

So also with religion: despite the effort to present a series of dominating perspectives, the hold of religion is always tentative. Even more, religion may take part in either the hegemony of the dominators or the dominated. For this reason, Gramsci was fascinated by the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Reformation. For all its apparent siding with conservative and repressive forces, its dirty little deals with the fascists, Gramsci traces out the way the first truly global organization has managed to persist for so long. The secret is that the Roman Catholic Church's primary concern is to look out for its own interests, involving deals with both the political right and left. If the Roman Catholic Church had an organizational lesson for the communists, then the Protestant Reformation gave a stunning example of how to shake and transform a society through and through. For Gramsci, the Reformation was the last time a thorough-going revolution had happened, a 'moral and intellectual reform' that shifted the very roots of society. He wishes dearly that Italy too had undergone such a shift, rather than its half-starts and misdirected efforts that were restricted to the upper classes and intellectuals. He

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[30] As Fontana writes, 'Hegemony is thus conceived as the vehicle whereby the dominant social groups establish a system of "permanent consent" that legitimates a prevailing social order by encompassing a complex network of mutually reinforcing and interwoven ideas affirmed and articulated by intellectuals'. Fontana, *Hegemony and Power: On the Relation Between Gramsci and Machiavelli*, p. 140.

[31] These two elements of leadership by consent and coercion emerge in Machiavelli's image of the centaur, upon which Gramsci comments: 'Another point to be decided and developed is that of the "double perspective" in political action and state life. There are various levels in which the double perspective can be presented, from the most elementary to the most complex, but they can be reduced theoretically to two fundamental levels, corresponding to the double nature of the Machiavellian Centaur, savage and human, force and consent, authority and hegemony, violence and civilization, the individual stage and the universal stage ("Church" and "State"), agitation and propaganda, tactics and strategy, etc.' Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, p. 161.

[32] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 21.

searches for an 'Italian Luther', suggesting it may well have been Machiavelli had he lived long enough.

Hegemony is therefore not merely an analysis of the contemporary situation, but also a means of overthrowing that situation; hegemony is both a tool of analysis and of revolution.[33] This feature also runs through my reading of Exodus 32, for here the narrative provides a model of hegemony in all its ambivalence. While Gramsci sees Machiavelli's prince as the harbinger of revolutionary politics, I will leave the decision as to Moses' revolutionary credentials in Exodus until later, although they have been asserted time and again. Above all, the one who emerges from the text is the armed prophet, the innovator and reformer, who blends persuasion and force.

The 'armed prophet' of Exodus 32

The preceding theoretical discussion enables me to interpret Exodus 32, first through Machiavelli and then with Gramsci.[34] I begin with the paradoxical virtues of the Prince: cruelty and clemency, generosity and meanness, keeping one's word or not. This allows me to draw upon the pair of force and consent, that is, arms along with intellectual, moral and religious reform; in short, hegemony. It turns out that this is a story about the hegemonic force of the law, for the law cannot operate without the consent of the people; yet this consent can be achieved only by force of arms. The next step is to focus on the state, especially the point that the prince and the people cannot exist without the other. However, here we encounter a problem: Exodus 32 involves Moses, the people and a third player, God. The whole issue of Moses' *virtú* (ability) and

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[33] Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

[34] For a conventional effort to locate Exodus 32 in the context of Israelite religion, especially in connection with the two bulls erected by Jeroboam in 1 Kgs 12.25–33, see Patrick D. Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville: WestminsterJohn Knox, 2000), pp. 20–1, 90. The reading that follows disagrees deeply with the suggestion of a 'democratization' of Moses through Exodus 32–4 to 35–40. Martin Ravndal Hauge, *The Descent from the Mountain: Narrative Patterns in Exodus 19–40* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

fortuna becomes relevant at this point, since not only does God comprise in large measure the function of fortune, but Moses must craft his leadership by managing God as well as the people. What are the implications for understanding the state and hegemony when Moses mediates between Yahweh and the people? All of this brings me back to political myth, only to ask the question 'what should be'? Is Exodus 32, as a fragment of a much larger piece, revolutionary or reactionary, utopian or dystopian?

A Machiavellian Moses?

I begin with the paradox of cruelty and clemency in the story of the Golden Calf in Exodus 32. In contrast with Moses, Aaron is the figure of clemency and humaneness. With not a whisper of criticism or refusal, let alone anger, he responds to the people's complaint by suggesting they bring *him* gold from which he can then be generous. In contrast to Aaron's easy-going character, Moses is a man of anger and cruelty. So how – according to Machiavelli – does Moses' cruelty become the true means of mercy? Yahweh is crucial in that paradox, for he calls for the annihilation of the people as they worship the Golden Calf. Compared with Yahweh, Moses becomes the merciful one, intervening to limit brutality and mass bloodshed. Thus, in the scene with the Levites (Exod. 32.25–9), Moses calls for loyalty first (v. 26) before demanding that the Levites kill brother, son, friend and neighbour. Not only does Moses secure the Levites' loyalty – for they now must stick with him in light of the murder of those closest to them – but the 3,000 dead produces a mere handful of corpses in contrast to what Yahweh had in mind. So Moses comes through as the wisely cruel leader, in contrast to Aaron's initial clemency that threatens greater cruelty.

As for generosity and meanness, the fatally generous figure in Exodus 32 is Aaron, who, in response to pressure from the people, gathers all their gold in order to make the calf. The twist in this text is that Aaron is not strictly the generous one. Instead, he acquiesces to the people's request, asking them for gold. In fact, he insists on a tax so that he can be generous, a formula that leads to discontent. Ultimately, leadership is the issue. Aaron's excuse to Moses betrays his leadership aspirations:

> Do not let the anger of my Lord (*adonai*) burn hot; you know the people, that they are bent on evil. They said to me, 'Make us gods, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him'. So I said to them, 'Whoever has gold, take it off'; so they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf! (Exod. 32.22–4)

Aaron shuffles and shifts responsibility, so that it seems he could not help but become leader in light of 'events' (compare 32.1–6). In other words, Aaron gives in, seeking to rule by consent, allowing the people to set the agenda, attempting to be generous at the people's expense. It would not be the last time he opposes Moses (see Numbers 12, this time with Miriam). Moses, by contrast, has none of the popular generosity of Aaron, bringing instead the tablets of stone to which he expects obedience. As far as he is concerned, the false generosity of Aaron can lead only to destruction. His immediate response is to throw down the tablets, burn and pulverize the calf and force the people to drink the heady brew of idolatrous gold dust and water (Exod. 32.19–20).

Finally, on the question as to whether a ruler should be loved or feared, Moses is a classic Machiavellian prince, preferring that the people fear rather than love him. The various punishments meted out to the people, from the slight rap of enforced imbibing of liquids to the selected slaying of about 3,000 people, as well as the command to the Levites to kill brother, sons and friends, leads towards fear rather than love. Of course, for Machiavelli, only the ruler whom the people fear can be loved, for fear is a far better basis for stable rule.

Above all, Moses succeeds in avoiding both hatred and contempt. He is neither rapacious of the people's goods, nor does he take their women and form a harem. In fact, Moses studiously avoids taking Israelite women, making first a Midianite, Zipporah, his wife (Exod. 2.21) and then a Cushite (Num. 12.1). If anyone is rapacious, it is Aaron: he requires gold from the people in order to provide his own form of largesse. He is already at the stage of taxing the people in order to be generous, a paradox that Machiavelli argued leads to hatred by the people.

Moses exhibits many of the signs of a Machiavellian prince: his cruelty functions not only to secure his leadership, but also to avoid

the greater cruelty of mass annihilation (a paradoxical mercy); he neither taxes the people nor takes their women; his meanness is in contrast to Aaron's taxing generosity.[35] The image of Moses that emerges from the text is of a wise, capable and strong ruler, an example that Machiavelli could hardly avoid as a primary model.

Hegemony: Force, consent and reform

A Machiavellian reading takes us only so far (how is Moses an ideal model?). Gramsci's Marxist interpretation of Machiavelli makes the latter's work far more interesting and complex, particularly on the question of hegemony and revolutionary leadership. Let me begin with the question of arms: for both Gramsci and Machiavelli the organization and nature of armed force was an important aspect of the Prince's work, whether that involved the acquisition and maintenance of a new principality, or the revolution required for communism to be victorious. Moses fits the bill. He relies neither on mercenaries nor on auxiliaries, drawing his troops from within the people, as he does throughout Exodus–Deuteronomy, drawing from the most loyal of groups, the Levites. Or rather, he ensures their loyalty by ordering them to kill those to whom they may have felt an alternative loyalty. Now Moses has a loyal militia who cannot avoid staying with him, given the enmity and fear they have instilled among their families and friends.

However, Exodus 32 is not merely a narrative of force of arms: there is no armed insurrection that Moses must quell, for the people are too busy partying, full of dancing and revelry. Even Moses' fear of 'war in the camp' (Exod. 32.17) turns out to be unfounded, as Joshua points out (v. 18). Why then are the arms necessary? Apart from avoiding Yahweh's rampaging fury, the arms are necessary in order to ensure consent. The narrative of Exodus 32 begins with Moses' absence: he is on the mountain, apparently on his way down with the tablets of law in his hands. The stern, puritanical and killjoy side of Moses shows through, for he does

[35] Instead of seeing the paradoxical nature of power, Meyers reveals her bourgeois sensibilities by observing that the actions of Moses, Aaron and Yahweh are 'unexpected, shifting, and disturbing'. Carol Meyers, *Exodus* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 259.

not expect the pure enjoyment of worship that the Golden Calf seems to provide. But the act of destroying the tablets effectively indicates not only the well-known motif of Moses' anger but also the absence of the law among the Israelites. Moses brings down the law to find the Israelites already disobeying a law they have not yet received. Exodus 32 is then a story about the law. Not an earth-shattering conclusion, except that if we follow Gramsci then it is also a narrative about consent to the law. The law cannot operate, cannot come into being without consent, without the agreement and obedience of the people. Such consent, the narrative indicates, is impossible without the force of arms. In this intertwining of arms and consent we have Gramsci's notion of hegemony. To write that it is a narrative of the law is to write that it is a narrative concerning hegemony. Even this conclusion is not enough, since it is not merely a story of hegemony, but one that enacts with the narrative itself – and here I take Exodus 32 as a microcosm of the Pentateuch as a whole – the hegemony of the text over those who read it and hear it. The text itself is *torah*, law, and Moses carries with him the text that is to be read. Tautologically, a key figure within the story gives, through texts such as Exodus 32, the hegemonic authority of the text. There is then a certain logic – hegemonic – to the notion that Moses is the 'author' of the Torah, the Pentateuch.

I have withheld another feature of hegemony until now, namely, intellectual and moral reform. A niggling suspicion is that my discussion of Exodus 32 describes very well the workings of any repressive regime, any state's manufacturing of consent, no matter how reactionary or progressive. Gramsci stresses Machiavelli's concern with moral, religious and intellectual reform, reading Machiavelli as a forward-looking writer, one who points to what ought to be rather than what is. For Gramsci the great model of such reform is the Protestant Reformation, yet Luther and Calvin modelled themselves not only merely on Jesus Christ and the early Church, but also on figures such as Moses.

Thus, Exodus 32 is about law and hegemony – hegemony understood as a force of change rather than describing the status quo. As far as the story is concerned, there is a sharp opposition between what seem to be the regressive activities of Aaron and the people – gold contributions, golden calf, burnt offerings and sacrifices, revelry, in short a falling back to old practices – and the reforming direction of the newly minted law that Moses brings with him.

Thus, in the descriptions of the calf we find words of extravagance, pleasure and celebration: gold rings, images, festivals, sacrifices of well-being, eating and drinking, revelling. When we turn to Moses and Yahweh there is none of this, for the language reverts to austerity, control, obedience and punishment: command, anger, disaster, tablets of the testimony, engraving on stone, punishment and death. Rather than curtailing the perverse and sinful pleasure of the Israelites, a Gramscian reading notes that the text is cast in terms of reform, a change in intellectual, moral and religious sensibilities, through force of arms if necessary.

The State, Moses and God

Even so, Exodus 32 concerns more than the virtues of Moses as a leader, or indeed more than the mechanisms of hegemony. The issue that runs through it, backwards and forwards, is that of the people, or a state. In the end, the moral, religious and intellectual reform that Moses brings about through the law, through consent and force, can be understood only in terms of the 'state', the distinct political entity of the *'am* with which Exodus as a whole is overloaded. Indeed, following on from my discussion of terms for people in the first chapter on Althusser and Genesis, there is a marked shift in Exodus from the mixed usage of *goi* and *'am* in Genesis to a predominant usage of *'am*. In Exodus the promise of a people is finally realized, although in the absence of the fulfilment of promise of the land (is the fulfilment of the former predicated on the absence of the latter?). This realized promise is marked by the use of *'am*, which bears also the sense of 'state', along with its usage as 'people'. If I restrict myself to Exodus 32, then *'am* appears 14 times (vv. 1, 3, 7, 9, 11, 12, 14, 22, 25, 28, 31, 34, 35), even to the point of Yahweh and Moses alternatively designating them as 'your state' when they act perversely (see Exod. 32.7, 11–12). Simply put, Exodus 32 is one text that explores some of the features that are required for a 'state'.

The most telling point is yet to come: Moses and the *'am* of Israel need each other for their very existence.[36] One of Gramsci's

[36] While Moberley stresses the importance of Moses in the story (rather than conventional emphases on Yahweh), he does not take the next step and see that

astute observations is that the new prince is a popular leader, one who unites a dispersed and disaggregated population to become a people or state. The people, in other words, cannot gather together without the prince; he is a singular expression of the popular and collective will. But the converse also applies, for the prince himself would not be possible without the people; the one requires the other. For Gramsci, this is Machiavelli's great discovery, and it enables him to develop his own argument concerning the political party. But is this not the case with Moses also? Only in Exodus does the term *'am* become the privileged designator for Israel, at the same narrative moment that both the collective entity of Israel emerges and Moses the Egyptian is born (the 'beginning' of the book itself).

I suggest that such a narrative mirror also operates between Moses and the people in Exodus 32. Let me develop this point via a detour: a major player absent from Machiavelli's or Gramsci's deliberations is God. By contrast, in Exodus 32, Yahweh is a central character. How should we understand this character? Four points may be made. First, as with the world of the text, he is a product of the anonymous author or authors who wrote it. That means there is always someone or some group who is more powerful than God in these texts and these are the authors who construct this character in the first place. Second, the authors usually manage to efface their role in narrative or poetic construction. In Exodus, this is brought about by authorial displacement onto Moses himself. By removing their obvious presence from the text, their own particular ideological positions can then be presented as those of God, as narrated by Moses. Third, this mechanism enables a particular hegemony to roll into place. In other words, God or Yahweh is the place-holder of hegemony in the text. Finally, hegemony is a contested site, so we should expect to find Yahweh himself a contested figure, a site of struggle for competing voices.

Let us see how that struggle appears in the text. To begin with, Yahweh functions for the bulk of the story like Machiavelli's *fortuna*. The vagaries of fortune are those factors beyond the

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Moses depends on Israel for his existence. R. Walter L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32–34* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983), pp. 49–50.

control of the prince, which he must nevertheless manage to the best of his ability and to which he must adapt if his leadership is to remain intact. Hardly the most consistent of operators, Yahweh perpetually throws crises at Moses. In Exodus 32 these crises are the twice-uttered threats of the annihilation of the people (vv. 10 and 43). Moses responds by attempting both to manage Yahweh – he calls on Yahweh to 'turn from your fierce anger' (32.12) or forgive the people their sin (32.32) and suggests that Yahweh take Moses' life (32.32) – and adapting to the situation – the measured cruelty of the Levites in order to stave off Yahweh's wrath. Through his various responses to fortune – Yahweh – the narrative emphasizes Moses' *virtú*.

Above all (and now we return via the detour to my earlier point), Yahweh highlights the fact that the very existence of Moses relies on the existence of the people, and vice versa. On this matter, it is worth noting Moses' challenge to Yahweh to take his life instead of the people's, to blot his name out of the book (Exod. 32.32). Too quickly has the whiff of the atonement sacrifice wafted over this text – Moses offers to take on the sin of the people – but the point lies elsewhere: Moses himself would disappear without the people. Yahweh promises to make another 'state' from Moses (Exod. 32.10), but this will not do, for Moses *must* ensure that the people survive if he is to survive. This means that Moses' request in Exodus 32.32 is not an either/or option; it is two sides of the same coin. The destruction of the people or of Moses would result in the pair disappearing from the narrative. This is why Moses throws down the challenge to Yahweh: if you destroy them, you destroy me, so take me first.

All of this means that the 'ultimately determining instance' of Exodus 32 is the 'state' of Israel. In its own way, Gramsci's work brings the discussion back to this point. But it is a new state, for which a new hegemony is required, namely, that of the law in the hands of Moses. In this respect, Gramsci does appear to be correct: hegemony is a forward-looking concept, one that seeks out what ought to be. Exodus 32 exhibits all the workings of both Machiavelli's and Gramsci's desire for change, the former into the nation-state of capitalism, the latter into the new state, led by the party, of whatever communism might be. But this is why Gramsci's description of Machiavelli's *The Prince* also applies to Exodus 32 and the texts that surround it: they are political myths. And that

myth functions by playing out the ideological possibilities and necessary conditions for a new state. The initial function of such a myth is to create a fantasy image of the new 'state', one that has not existed up until then. However, once that state is realized, the myth becomes both a legitimation and critique of the actually existing form of that state.

Conclusion: Utopian or Dystopian?

I have explored some of the details of the curiously close fit between Gramsci, Machiavelli and Exodus 32: the paradoxical virtues of Moses, the necessity for consent and force in hegemony, and the binding together of Moses and the people. However, I would like to close with a question Gramsci leaves hanging. Is such a state utopian or not? Gramsci's daring move was to claim Machiavelli as a utopian man of action, that *The Prince* is a political manifesto of the calibre of *The Communist Manifesto*. As far as Exodus is concerned, particularly the story of the escape from Egypt, there has been as much debate as to its revolutionary credentials as there has been over Machiavelli's book. While liberation and political theologies have used Exodus as a paradigm of revolution, a biblical source and justification for revolutionary action in the present, the Exodus model has also come under significant criticism, beginning with Edward Said's response to Michael Walzer's wayward *Exodus and Revolution*.[37] In his criticism of Walzer's effort to appropriate the Exodus narrative as a non-Marxist alternative for social change – what Walzer calls an 'Exodus politics' – and the use of the narrative to justify Israeli oppression of Palestinians, Said argues for a close connection between the Exodus from Egypt and the invasion of Canaan, all under the command of a God who orders the destruction of the local inhabitants. Following Said, others have carried his arguments further, suggesting that the Exodus functions as an ideological justification for appropriation of Canaan in the

[37] Edward Said, 'Michael Walzer's *Exodus and Revolution*: A Canaanite Reading', in *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question* (Edward Said and Christopher Hitchens (eds); London: Verso, 1988), pp. 161–78; Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*.

same way that the Holocaust of the Second World War is used to justify the establishment of the state of Israel[38]; or that the Exodus narrative must lead to dispossession of another people since it cannot be separated from monotheism, with its demand for one land for one people under one God.[39]

A more utopian reading of Exodus relies on the disjunction between the escape from Egypt and the invasion of Canaan. Focusing on the former, and coming from a very different political climate than that of ancient Southwest Asia, liberation and political theologians have taken a long tradition in which Moses is the liberator and connected it explicitly with Marxism.[40] In this case Exodus becomes a lasting paradigm, no matter how mythical, of a revolutionary and utopian drive that is profoundly biblical in origin.

Whereas I feel that there is no necessary connection between the narratives of Exodus and conquest (agreeing with the liberation and political theologians), that does not render Moses and the Exodus any more appealing (here I agree with Said et al., but for different reasons). However, I want to shift the terminology slightly to the question of utopia, although, following Jameson,[41] I take it as a code word for socialism. In suggesting that Machiavelli is a utopian thinker, Gramsci argues that Machiavelli's work becomes the opportunity to reflect on the role of the Communist Party. In

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[38] Ella Shohat, 'Antinomies of Exile: Said at the Frontiers of National Narratives', in *Edward Said: A Critical Reader* (Michael Sprinker (ed.); Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), pp. 121–43 (137–40).

[39] John Docker, *1492: A Poetics of Diaspora* (London: Verso, 2001).

[40] J. Severino Croatto, *Exodus: A Hermeneutics of Freedom* (trans. Salvator Attanasio; Maryknoll: Orbis, 1981); Alfredo Fierro, 'Exodus Event and Interpretation in Political Theologies,' *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (ed. Norman K. Gottwald; Mayknoll: Orbis, 1983), pp. 473–81; Jorge V. Pixley, *On Exodus: A Liberation Perspective* (trans. Robert Barr; Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1987); but see the later reflections by Jorge V. Pixley, 'Liberating the Bible: Popular Bible Study and Its Academic Allies,' *The Future of the Biblical Past: Envisioning Biblical Studies on a Global Key* (Roland Boer and Fernando Segovia (eds); Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), pp. 167–78; Pablo R. Andiñach, 'Liberation in Latin American Biblical Hermeneutics,' *The Future of the Biblical Past: Envisioning Biblical Studies on a Global Key* (Roland Boer and Fernando Segovia (eds); Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), pp. 137–48.

[41] Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005).

one respect I agree: the model of the merciless revolutionary who does what it takes to get the job done is the most appealing part of the images of both Machiavelli's new prince and of Moses. Further, if I take the line that the very effort to imagine a different world, no matter how dystopian the content of that imagination might be, is in itself utopian, then Exodus, particularly Chapter 32, does count as a utopian text. However, a problem that Gramsci faces – brought into sharp relief by the narrative of Exodus and its subsequent appropriation – is that he relies ultimately on a past model. Machiavelli's genius was to see through the contradictory trends of his own time and forge an ideological position that became constitutive of the nation-state under capitalism. All the same, it is a model of revolution based on the bourgeois revolution. In an analogous fashion, Moses and Exodus have been understood as a narrative of past events and thereby the source of a particular model (reinforced by its biblical authority) of social change and state formation to which we are still tied, for better or worse. Apart from the fact that imagining change can use only the various bits and pieces of language, thought and history available at the time, the problem is one of utopia itself: in the same way that it is not possible to construct a blueprint for a society we do not know, even down to its language, so also the change itself can only be hinted at rather than prescribed. For if the model of change is tied too closely to existing models, then the patterns of social and political interaction, class and gender relations, economics and ideology have a habit of replicating themselves in the new society. Thus, the figure of Moses as the brutal reformer or revolutionary, the representation of Yahweh as the validation of the new state, the systematic exclusions that the notion of the '*'am* Israel' implies, the usages to which Exodus has been put – in other words, the apparatus of the state whose workings appear in detail in the political myth of Exodus 32 – indicate a few hurdles too many for such models of change and the state to be utopian.

Summary

- Gramsci argues that Machiavelli's 'prince' is a mythical figure that embodies the collective.

- Machiavelli's principles for a ruler use Moses as the prime model.
- Hegemony is more a tactic for revolutionary overthrow than maintaining the status quo.
- Moses appears in Exodus as the quintessential Machiavellian leader.
- He uses a mixture of force and consent.
- Moses and indeed God cannot exist without the people-cum-state.

3

Deleuze and Guattari: Nomads, scapegoats and resistance

It has become fashionable to focus on Gilles Deleuze at the expense of his collaborator and co-author, Félix Guattari.[1] I wish to go against that trend, for when the two – one a quiet philosopher who avoided travel and the other an experimental psychoanalyst and radical militant – worked together, Marx was always present. Deleuze himself was quite aware of this proclivity, observing, 'I think that Félix Guattari and I have remained Marxists, in our two different ways'.[2] Even more, when they collaborated, the Bible rather than theology became the preferred point of engagement.[3]

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[1] Among 'Deleuzians' one often comes across citations to the joint works that mention only Deleuze.

[2] Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations: 1972–90* (trans. Martin Joughin; New York: Columbia University Press, 1995 [1990]), p. 171.

[3] The solitary Deleuze deals with theology in his studies of Leibniz and Spinoza, but only with Guattari does the Bible appear in the company of Marx. For the former, see Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (trans. Paul Patton; New York: Columbia University Press, 1994 [1968]); Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza, Practical Philosophy* (trans. Robert Hurley; San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988 [1970]); Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* (trans. Martin Joughin; New York: Zone Books, 1990 [1968]); Peter Hallward, *Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (London: Verso, 2006); Philip Goodchild, 'Why Is Philosophy So Compromised with God?', *Deleuze and Religion* (Mary Bryden

In that light, the present chapter is like the one that precedes it on Gramsci (and Machiavelli), for I seek less to apply some of the key ideas of Deleuze and Guattari to the biblical text but to engage with their reading of a couple of texts. These are Exodus 18 and Leviticus 16, the stories of Moses delegating his power on the advice of Jethro, his father-in-law, and of the scapegoat ritual. Their analysis appears in two distinct sections or 'plateaus' of *A Thousand Plateaus* called 'On Several Regimes of Signs' and 'Treatise on Nomadology'.[4]

The present chapter begins with some explanation of the concepts that are relevant for the biblical texts in question, with the caveat that in the case of Deleuze and Guattari it is indeed impossible to summarize the whole of their many-faceted works. In the section that follows, I explore the ways these concepts become embodied in their own interpretation of the biblical texts. Here I seek unique insights they may provide for a Marxist reading of the Bible as well as identifying shortcomings in that exegesis.

Resistance and despotism

To begin with, I would like to consider for a moment the structure of *A Thousand Plateaus*, particularly since I focus on two of its 'strata' or 'plateaus'. To set the scene, we need to take into account its sibling and precursor, *Anti-Oedipus*,[5] which first sought to develop a new universal history – the type of ambitious project

(ed.); London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 156–66; Philip Goodchild, 'Deleuze and Philosophy of Religion', (Nottingham, 2007); Daniel W. Smith, 'The Doctrine of Univocity: Deleuze's Ontology of Immanence', *Deleuze and Religion* (Mary Bryden (ed.); London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 167–83; Eliot Albert, 'Deleuze's Impersonal, Hylozoic Cosmology: The Expulsion of Theology', *Deleuze and Religion* (Mary Bryden (ed.); London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 184–95.

[4] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (trans. Brian Massumi; London: Athlone Press, 1988 [1980]), pp. 111–30, 351–423. The second section was also published separately in English as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Nomadology: The War Machine* (trans. Brian Massumi; New York: Semiotext(e), 1986).

[5] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane; New York: Viking Press, 1977 [1972]).

to which philosophers seem particularly prone. If anything, *A Thousand Plateaus* is even more ambitious, seeking a grand theory of the cosmos, evolution, geology, human history, economics, politics, mythology, music, literature and so on. In *Anti-Oedipus* we encounter the threefold distinction that returns in a new way in *A Thousand Plateaus*, between the tribal and 'savage', the imperial and 'barbarian', and capitalism. This is then overlaid with what may be called an eco-social theory of production, emphasizing the category of becoming rather than being and seeking to dispense with the nature–culture distinction common to European philosophy. A further overlay is the thorough effort to rethink the relations between Marx and Freud, without prioritizing either one. The core idea here is 'desiring-production', an effort to locate the motor of psycho-economic history. That is, desire (Freud) becomes simultaneously a socio-economic reality and production (Marx) becomes a feature of the unconscious. With this tool, Deleuze and Guattari feel they have found a universal process without a subject (and is thereby not anthropocentric), and that is able to link natural, social and psychological dimensions of existence.

I am less interested here is teasing out this admittedly brief synopsis of *Anti-Oedipus* (into the nature of schizoanalysis and the forms of desiring production), except to note the structural implications of their approach. In order to indicate the myriad and unexpected connections that 'desiring-production' enables, they play with a wide range of apparently absurd conjunctions. Yet *Anti-Oedipus* still has discrete chapters that develop an argument in line with the narrative conventions of writing. By the time of *A Thousand Plateaus* and under the influence of the many writing experiments set on their way by the revolutionary movement of 1968, they dispense with such a structure and develop the famous 'plateaus'. In their desire to avoid fixing any particular argument in a specific time and place, the plateaus are arranged in discontinuous and apparently haphazard globules of time. For example, what appears to be a concern with the Hebrew Bible and ancient Southwest Asia appears a quarter of the way through the book, while the apparently earlier period of nomads and their war-machine is located towards the end of the book. This strategy is part of their general desire to avoid fixation and ossification, to maintain the constantly mobile forms of resistance. The term they choose for this structure is the 'rhizome', thought operating in

terms of root systems and burrows, enabling in theory connections between any of the points of the work.

The multiplicity of resistance

It is a standard move to say that one cannot summarize such a book, but then attempt to do so anyway. I follow that convention here, except that I want to identify certain emphases that are important for the engagement with Exodus and Leviticus later in this chapter. In particular, I focus on two main ideas: the multiplicity of resistance, which includes the virtual; the signifying regime as that is manifested in the despotic state. I begin with resistance, since in their own way Deleuze and Guattari provide a theory of constitutive resistance that was to be developed by Antonio Negri. By constitutive resistance I mean not the common position that oppressive state power is the stable centre against which resistance must struggle, but that resistance itself is the driving force. State power must then constantly adapt, finding ever new ways to attempt to overcome that resistance. The real contribution of Deleuze and Guattari is to argue that constitutive resistance is multiple and constantly mobile.

In order to understand that approach to resistance, we need to consider briefly three of its features. The first concerns multiplicity, concerning which they write:

> Let us return to the story of *multiplicity*, for the creation of this substantive marks a very important moment. It was created precisely in order to escape the abstract opposition between the multiple and the one, to escape dialectics, to succeed in conceiving the multiple in the pure state, to cease treating it as a numerical fragment of a lost Unity or Totality or as the organic element of a Unity or Totality yet to come, and instead distinguish between different types of multiplicity.[6]

They seek to overcome the old philosophical problem of the one and the many, in which the many is a partial representation of the

[6] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 32

one, or the trace of a mythical unity that once existed or is perhaps awaited in a utopian future. Instead, they banish the one, arguing that multiplicity is all there is. The theological undercurrent of this argument should be clear (where God is the one), but how do you banish the one? Multiplicity is a substantive rather than a predicate: instead of saying that 'people are many' or 'many people', in which 'people' is the substantive and 'many' is the predicate, they assert that 'many' is itself a substantive, a noun that then relates to 'people'. The same can therefore be said of the phrase 'resistance is multiple'. The result is that the problem becomes a matter not of the one and the many (as predicates), but the relations between different types of multiplicities.[7]

This approach to multiplicities is closely connected with virtuality. Without sinking into the philosophical detail of this argument, the virtual describes not a possibility that is then realized, that comes to fruition. On this understanding, realization is something more than its possibility. Instead, the virtual is real in itself. Its actualization does not add anything more to the virtual (that is, existence). The upshot of this argument is that the virtual must be different from the actualization; the ground cannot resemble that which it grounds.[8] Not only does this argument connect with multiples (virtual and actual are multiples constituted by difference), but it also has profound consequences for understanding resistance. In other words, even if resistance is not actualized, its virtuality or genetic conditions has a powerful reality. The possibility of resistance is not an anticipation of the real moment of resistance, but is already a real resistance. In this way, Deleuze and Guattari are able to deal with measures taken by the despotic state to forestall revolutionary activity. These measures do not prevent such resistance; instead they indicate the reality of that virtual resistance. Even more, the very measures themselves – police action, laws, spying and so on – produce the virtuality of resistance, so much so that it becomes a reverse cause.

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[7] The argument for the substantive multiple is a development from Deleuze's earlier work on Bergson. Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism* (trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam; New York: Zone Books, 1988 [1966]).

[8] Since the basis of what is actual cannot be the same as what is actualized. Or, in traditional terms, cause and effect are distinct and real items that are different from one another and relate as multiples.

The despotic State

I have begun with resistance for what should now be obvious reasons, since it is the enabling force. Now we come to the power that responds to resistance, namely the signifying regime of the despotic state. Despite their efforts not to fix such a state in any particular historical formation, they do show a fascination with the despotism of the state in ancient Southwest Asia. As they write, 'there has always been a State, quite perfect, quite complete … But of greater importance is the reverse hypothesis: that the State has always been in a relation with an outside, and is inconceivable independent of that relationship.'[9] The state is eternal, so much so that, as they observe, ever more archaeological discoveries find empires ever earlier in human history. But the state cannot exist without an opposition, which is external. Here is the constitutive resistance of which I spoke earlier. I will question the external nature of that resistance in my reading of the biblical texts, but for now I would like to emphasize yet another feature of the state: its mode of dominance is through what is called a despotic regime of signs.

This requires some touchstones in their thorough reshaping of semiotics, or the theory of signs.[10] I am less interested here in Deleuze's earlier encounter with the linguistic turn in *The Logic of Sense,*[11] where he locates signification (along with denotation and manifestation)[12] at the tertiary level of language.[13] Only at this level of genesis, when language achieves its full form, does signification

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[9] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 360.

[10] This wholesale reshaping of semiotics could not have taken place without the tradition that lies behind it, a tradition whose earlier stage is reflected in the spade work of Barthes, Greimas, Peirce or Hjemslev. Yet Deleuze and Guattari thoroughly overturn the settled assumptions of semiology, resisting an ossification that resembles too closely the despotic state.

[11] Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale; New York: Columbia University Press, 1990 [1969]).

[12] Denotation concerns the relations between propositions and the objects to which they refer, while manifestation focuses on the subject that utters those propositions.

[13] The primary and secondary stages concern the noises of the body and the surface of sense (which is thereby non-sense), which Deleuze traces in the linguistic development of a child.

take place. Indeed, it is precisely in language that signification has its home, for a language operates by means of relating propositions to one another. By *A Thousand Plateaus* signification takes a more sinister turn. Here it is the realm of the despotic state, which is the real location of what Deleuze and Guattari call the signifying regime.[14] In that regime, language is ossified, fixed in established and controlled forms. They call this 'signifiance', which is the process of totalizing and flattening ('bi-univocalizing') the relationships between propositions. Instead of the breaks and ruptures between signs, the signifying relation is locked into place. Hence their description in *Anti-Oedipus* of the philosophers of signifiers as 'lapdogs of tyrants'; hence their refusal of metaphor as part of their resistance to the signifying regime's imperialism; hence the very structure of *A Thousand Plateaus* that seeks to disrupt the ossification of language and the relations between propositions.

In the sections of *A Thousand Plateaus* that interest me in this chapter, the signifying regime takes the form of what has been called the oriental despot, the central despotic state that appears time and again with its aspiring potentate, priests, functionaries and perpetual dinner guests. It matters not where one finds the despotic state – Pharaoh, David, Solomon or any of the big or little kingdoms that dotted the history of ancient Southwest Asia – for the form is the same. However, their interest is in what resists such a state: the poly-vocal and segmented tribe (a pre-signifying regime); the numbered war bands of the nomads (a counter-signifying regime), the escapees who flee an oppressor and gain an identity (a post-signifying regime). In my discussion of the biblical texts below (Exod. 18 and Lev. 16), I focus on the second and third of these regimes. In the case of Exodus 18, the counter-signifying nomads appear under the warlord Moses, while in Leviticus 16, the banished scapegoat and the Israelites fleeing from Egypt – the connection is typical of Deleuze and Guattari

[14] The context of the revolutionary currents in 1968, in which Guattari was active, plays a significant role in the development of this position. The Gaullist state, the French Communist Party, the educational institutions, the churches – these and more became manifestations of the despotic state. It attempted to create a unified world, controlled and managed by subjects in the know, through a codified body of knowledge that was policed by intellectual disciplines. Yet, these are never givens, for they arise in conflicts that have specific historical and political forms.

– become the post-signifying regime. Now it is possible to see the way resistance becomes multiple through the various regimes that resist the despotic state, where the signifying regime makes an appearance.

All the same, Deleuze and Guattari prefer to argue that such resistance is outside the realm of the petty despot, while the biblical texts indicate that resistance is as much an internal as an external affair. This unwitting feature – admitted occasionally – is a central feature of my argument below, so let me offer a brief outline before the detail of biblical interpretation. The first concerns the counter-signifying regime of the nomadic war machine. Deleuze and Guattari prefer to see it as a thoroughly external threat that repeatedly obliterates state and crushes empires. Yet, these actions are as much internal as external, for the nomads are refugees who take to the hills from the village-communes when the burdens of the state (conscription, indentured labour, taxation) become too much. At the level of the biblical text, what appears to be external becomes internal when one keeps in mind that the world created for these stories is the comprehensive myth of the text itself. That is, we find out about the nomads only through the text, which creates them and their acts in the first place. However, the scapegoat – the second item – is the best example of this internal dynamic, for the scapegoat is not so much a foreign body that needs to be expelled, but an internal feature that the despotic state needs in order to exist at all. The same applies to the Israelites who flee into the wilderness, for they are the scapegoat in collective form, which Deleuze and Guattari follow into the desert.

The 'Nomads' of Exodus 18

A mobile war party, carefully numbered into units, innovators with weapons, led by none other than Moses, who is advised by Jethro, his father-in-law and priest of Midian – this is the refreshing reading of Exodus 18 by Deleuze and Guattari. For them, this is an excellent manifestation of the counter-signifying regime, one type of opposition to the despotic state. But why Exodus 18? Again and again, Deleuze and Guattari cite the story of Moses and his father-in-law Jethro, who suggested that Moses organize the wilderness

Israelites, recently escaped from the despotic state of Egypt, in terms of numerical units.[15] Once Moses had the idea, there was no stopping him – order of the desert march, military organization and judicial procedures all became numbered.

Numbered bands

Number and arithmetic are therefore the defining semiotic features of the nomads, specifically in terms of numbering the war bands in tens, fifties, hundreds and thousands. Let us consider the biblical text more closely. In Exodus 18, Jethro joins the Israelites at Mount Horeb/Sinai in the wilderness. The occasion of the visit is twofold: to return Zipporah, Moses' wife and Jethro's daughter, along with their two sons, Gershom and Eliezer; and to see how Moses is faring in the nomadic, wilderness life. After the pleasantries of the first encounter – bowing, formal greetings, a long recounting of the escape from Egypt and obligatory sacrifices – the crucial moment arrives. Jethro notices that Moses sits all day judging matters great and small while the people stand for hours waiting on his word. Jethro shakes his head and asks Moses what in the world he thinks he is doing. Moses' explanation – that he must adjudicate in all disputes – does not impress Jethro. So Jethro gives his advice: tell the people what the laws are and then: 'Choose able men from all the people, such as fear God, men who are trustworthy and who hate a bribe; and place such men over the people *as rulers of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens*' (Exod. 18.21–2). Moses heeds the advice and organizes the people accordingly. The important point, as Deleuze and Guattari astutely note, is the numbering of the units themselves. And the purpose of such numbering is initially for judicial reasons, as well as the touching concern for Moses' health, but it becomes the organizing principle of the people, so much that it recurs throughout later texts (see Num. 26; 31.14, 48, 52, 54; 1 Sam. 8.12; 22.7; 29.2).

For Deleuze and Guattari, this numbering is a defining feature of nomads. It is intrinsic, not generated by a need of threat from outside. Instead, the need is internal, for the sake of mobility,

[15] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, pp. 118, 383, 388, 390, 392–4, 417.

relations among the people, and for logistical arrangements. Further, the numbered bands are not for the purpose of administration, taxes and control. But is this the case in Exodus 18? Three problems seem to challenge their reading. First, in Exodus 18 the initial purpose is clearly judicial, and to relieve the burden on Moses.[16] Only later in the narrative does the numbering attach itself to the war bands (Num. 31.14, 48–54). Yet, this is a minor problem, for the complexity of the nomadic war bands and their numbering may take a while to unfold in the narrative. A second problem is that many of the references to numbering the people refer to the organization of the army under a despotic state – that of Saul and David (2 Sam. 18.1, 4; 21.7; 2 Kgs. 11.9; 1 Chron. 13.1; 26.26; 27.1; 28.1; 29.6; 2 Chron. 1.2; 23.20; 25.5). Indeed, the standard position among many biblical critics is that the process of juridical and military numbering originated in the court of a petty despot, which was then read back into the 'past' in order to gain Mosaic authority.[17] Deleuze and Guattari's reading thereby challenges such a standard position, so much so that they argue that the state may appropriate this system and adapt it to its own use – hence the similar pattern of organization in the armies of the state. The outcome, however, is what may be called a mixed semiotic: numbering is not exclusive to the nomadic war band, even if it originated with them. Third, how do we account for the census statistics of Numbers 26, a reference cited by Deleuze and Guattari in relation to the war band? The catch here is that the numbering is not purely in terms of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens, but rather a series of subtotals that round the number out to tens, eventually producing that fabled total of 610,730. Nevertheless, it is still numbering. More substantially, the census is explicitly of the tribes of Israel, and not of their mobile militia. Of course, one can argue that the tribes themselves are determined by

[16] For an emphasis on the juridical dimension, with an awareness of the way such matters were not distinct from religious matters, see the commentary by Carol Meyers, *Exodus* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 137–40.

[17] George W. Coats, *Exodus 1–18* (The Forms of Old Testament Literature; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 148; Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250–1050 BCE* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999 [1979]), p. 270.

their military structure, but that is not how the text reads. Instead, the segmented tribal lineages are primary (so also Numbers 1–3), with the numbering secondary. This textual presentation would turn numbering into a feature of tribal organization, which is for Deleuze and Guattari distinct from the nomadic war band (the tribe belongs to the pre-signifying regime, whereas the war band belongs to the counter-signifying regime). Has their reading of the text fallen down? Not quite, for I would suggest that the distinctions between these oppositional regimes are not as strict or as clear as Deleuze and Guattari would like to think. Indeed, this point is in line with another underlying theme of *A Thousand Plateaus*, namely that one should never fix and thereby ossify a situation, should never lock in a particular plateau with any historical formation.

Spies, prophets and weapon makers

Thus far, I have discussed one feature – numbering – of the counter-signifying regime, of which Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness are a telling example. Four other features remain: the warlike nomads are also distinguished by externality, espionage, prophecy and weaponry. They exist outside the state, a counter to it, attacking and sacking fortress, temple and palace. In their perpetual state of war against the state, the nomads operate via espionage and secrecy; one sends spies who infiltrate the city and undermine it from within. The prophet too is part of the nomadic band, manifesting the process by which religion, especially monotheistic religion, passes from its natural affinity with the state and the priest to that of war, especially holy war.[18] Finally, the nomadic war machine is where the innovations in weaponry take place. Hyksos in Africa, Scythians in Europe and then India and Persia, Mongols on the steppes, Hebrews in the Sinai – all of them were the source of new 'miniature atomic bombs' such as the man-animal-weapon, man-horse-bow, socketted bronze battle axe, iron sword and cast-steel sabre.[19]

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[18] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, pp. 383–4.

[19] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 404.

In order to see whether these remaining four features appear in the text of the Hebrew Bible, we need to search outside Exodus 18. I have little to say concerning externality, since the narrative represents the Israelites as external to any state. Indeed, they are caught for 40 years between Egypt and Canaan. As for spying, it appears in the ill–fated narrative of Numbers 13–14. Moses sends spies into the land of Canaan, only for the spies to return with the utopian–dystopian report that the land is indeed fertile, flowing with milk and honey, but that the people are strong, the cities large and well-fortified, and that the descendants of the Anakim live there. The spies opine that they seemed like grasshoppers before these warriors. The story is well-known: the people rebel, plan to return to Egypt, are threatened with annihilation by God, are spared and then condemned to spend another 40 years in the wilderness until the current generation dies off. Only much later, under Joshua, do two spies complete the task. In these narratives we do find the nomadic war machine coming face to face with the despotic state in all its apparent strength, even if the people are condemned for not trusting in the power of their own war machine and, of course, the deity.

As for prophecy, Moses too becomes a prophet in the desert. As Deuteronomy 34.10 puts it, 'there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face'. For some strange reason, Deleuze and Guattari make little of Moses the prophet, preferring to cite Mohammed as the prophet par excellence. In his hands, monotheism is transformed into a religion of perpetual war, the holy war against the state. Even if the initial impulse for religion comes from the state (a dubious claim), religion undergoes a radical deterritorialization when it is wedded to the war machine.[20]

The prophet leads us into our last theme, weaponry and metalworking, although by an extraordinarily convoluted (nomadic?) path. Thus far I have been reasonably content to stitch Deleuze and Guattari's proposed nomadic war machine onto the biblical texts of the Pentateuch. But now the threads that connected them with the Bible begin to come apart, although in an unexpected direction.

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[20] On deterritorialization, see my later discussion of the despotic state.

In order to see how this un-stitching happens we need to follow a torturous and fanciful line of biblical analysis.

The last feature of the counter-signifying nomads concerns metallurgy, the smiths and makers of weapons. For Deleuze and Guattari, the nomadic war machine invents, manufactures and deploys a devastating superiority in weaponry.[21] Apart from the deity, where are these to be found? Deleuze and Guattari fix on the Kenites. Time and again, they mention that Jethro is a Kenite, not a Midianite.[22] Yet that connection is based on but one verse. In Judges 1.16, we find that the Kenites are listed as the descendants of Moses' father-in-law (Jethro is not named directly). In other texts, the Kenites join the Israelites in the desert, appear largely as tent-dwellers and are thanked for assisting the Israelites in their passage from Egypt (Judg. 4.11, 17; 5.24; 1 Sam. 15.6). But let us go back to that curious reference to Moses' father-in-law in Judges 1.16. On the basis of this slender text much hangs, not only for biblical scholars but also for Deleuze and Guattari. It reads: 'And the sons of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up with the people of Judah from the city of palms and into the wilderness of Judah.' Jethro is not named, and yet scholars assume that he is the one in question. On the basis of this slimmest of 'evidence', an older generation of biblical scholars argued that the Kenites were a sub-group of the Midianites, since Jethro is described as a Midianite in Exodus 3.1 and 18.1.[23] They go further, suggesting that the speciality of the Kenites was metalworking, especially in bronze and iron. The 'evidence': a tenuous argument based purely

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[21] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, pp. 394–415.

[22] The Midianites do in fact appear as the ideal war band. Midianite marauders, notably with camels (as the man-animal-weapon assemblage), continually threatening the Israelites (Num. 31; Judg. 6–8; Ps. 83.9; Isa. 9.4, 10.26). One nomadic war machine meets another, without resolution.

[23] William Foxwell Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1953), pp. 98–9; Robert G. Boling, *Judges* (Anchor Bible; Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), p. 57; James Hastings, *A Dictionary of the Bible* (vol. 2; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1903), p. 834; John Bright, *A History of Israel* (3rd edn; London: SCM, 1980). Deleuze and Guattari cite two French scholars with similar assumptions. Eduard Dhorme, *La religion des Hébreux nomades* (Brussels: Nouvelle Société d'Editions, 1937); Zecharia Mayani, *Les Hyksos et le monde de la Bible* (Paris: Payot, 1956).

on etymology, for Kenite, or *Qeni*, may be read via etymological connections as 'smith'. Then again, it may also derive from words that mean dirge, reed, nest, buy or create – the meaning is not certain. Once scholars have spun such fantasies, the etymological link to Cain (*Qayin*) is a small imaginative leap: this wanderer was also the forefather of Tubal-Cain, the 'forger of all instruments of bronze and iron' (Gen. 38.22). The Kenites, if not the Midianites, end up being a tribe of smiths – a point Deleuze and Guattari unfortunately replicate in their own analysis.[24] To cap off this extraordinary piece of exegesis, we also find the suggestion that the Yahweh of Mosaic monotheism was nothing less than a Kenite/Midianite wilderness god, appropriated and developed by Moses into the warlike and jealous Yahweh (Gen. 4.22).

In the end, we probably do not need the Kenites and the mythical metallurgy to make the point concerning the mobile war band. Four features are enough: numbering, externality, espionage and prophecy. The text is keen to represent them as opposed to the despotic states that surround them. Of course, that entails we accept the framework of the text, which constructs a complex political myth and thereby adds another level of signification to those that Deleuze and Guattari delineate.[25] The catch in all this is that the depiction of the nomadic war band also presents them as a state-in-waiting. Laws are given, a judicial system is established, a census is taken – these and other features prepare the nomads to become a state themselves.

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[24] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, pp. 414–15, 529n. 14.

[25] Athalya Brenner, 'Introduction', *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy* (Athalya Brenner (ed.), *The Feminist Companion to the Bible*; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), pp. 11–19 (11); Niels Peter Lemche, *The Israelites in History and Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1998), pp. 86–132; Thomas L. Thompson, *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); William G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 98n. 1; Roland Boer, *Political Myth: On the Use and Abuse of Biblical Themes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

The despots and scapegoats of Leviticus 16

From Exodus 18 we pass to Leviticus 16 and in doing so we pass from the nomadic war machine to the despotic state, from the counter-signifying regime to the signifying regime.[26] The state is, for Deleuze and Guattari, always despotic. As I pointed out earlier, the signifying regime is constituted by the relations between propositions, in a way that makes interpretation pile upon interpretation. Rather than freeing language to be itself, the signifying regime seeks to fix and control language through a process of totalizing and flattening (or 'bi-univocalizing') the relations between signs and thereby propositions. Language congeals and then ossifies. This is despotism.

The face of God

However, this is not the whole story, for the signifying regime is constituted by a tension, between the 'goat's arse and the face of the god (*le cul du bouc et le visage du dieu*)'.[27] Here is the tension between the state and its rebels, reaction and revolution, oppression and resistance, and between the centralizing religion of the state and its negation. But who is the face of God? The despot, of course, for he is so often a god himself, or at least son or representative of a god. Except for the earliest phases of ancient Southwest Asia, especially in Mesopotamia when the temple precedes the palace as the focus of the towns, the palace is dominant. The front of the palace faces the temple, which is itself within the royal compound. Priests become apparatchiks of the petty potentate, who controls the rituals of the temple itself.

Deleuze and Guattari set the scene of Leviticus 16 as follows:

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[26] For a standard effort to locate the Day of Atonement ritual in the context of Israelite religion, see the useful survey by Patrick D. Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), pp. 115–17.

[27] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 116.

> The complete system, then, consists of the paranoid face or body of the despot–god in the signifying center of the temple; the interpreting priests who continually recharge the signified in the temple, transforming it into signifier; the hysterical crowd of people outside, clumped in tight circles, who jump from one circle to another; the faceless, depressive scapegoat emanating from the center, chosen, treated, and adorned by the priests, cutting across the circles in its headlong flight into the desert.[28]

The people are in the wilderness, and the tent of worship has been set up in the midst of the camp. The despot, Moses with the glowing face (Exod. 34.29–35), meets with his god inside the mobile temple (Lev. 16.2; Num. 7.89; see also Josh. 7.10–15; 1 Sam. 3.1–15). But so does Aaron, his brother, who must prepare with arcane rituals and codes of dress to come before the god, who appears 'in the cloud upon the mercy seat' (Lev. 16.2). He undertakes a series of rituals hidden to all but him, having to do with animals, blood and fat. His clansmen engage in endless interpretation of interpretation, reading signs from the slain animals in the same way they interpret the texts they produce. The people stand outside, hysterical and fearful of the punishment that is a hair's-breadth away (Lev. 16.33–4). The scapegoat, which staggers out of the door of the tabernacle, is led by a man through the crowd and out of the camp, and then released with much relief into the desert.

The goat's arse

The goat is of course the scapegoat, which represents the other side of the tension within the signifying regime of the despot. It is one of two goats: 'a first expiatory goat is sacrificed, but a second goat is driven away, sent out into the arid desert'.[29] Or, as Leviticus 16.21–2 puts it:

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[28] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 116.

[29] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 116. Translation mine.

> And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, and all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and send him away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall bear all their iniquities upon him to a solitary land; and he shall let the goat go in the wilderness.

Azazel is the goat's temporary name, which is traditionally translated as 'scapegoat', or 'the goat that goes'. But it may also mean a name for the demon of the wilderness to whom the goat is sent, a jagged rock or a precipice to which the goat is expelled, or the wrath of God that the goat is to appease.[30] Deleuze and Guattari prefer the initial etymology, as *le bouc émissaire*, the goat sent out, yet we should not rush too quickly to fix the meaning of the word (is that not a feature of the signifying regime?). So, let us assume *Azazel* evokes all of the senses in its semantic field: the goat is the one that goes out into the wilderness, to the rocky precipice where the demon lives so as to appease the wrath of God. The word itself is a narrative, a narrative that is embodied in the elaborate ritual of atonement.

Leviticus 16.21–2 is too often isolated from the wider textual context, the ritual in which the high priest is crucial – Aaron, who is always on the verge of making a minor mistake with catastrophic consequences. The text is full of obsessive concern over priestly vestments, ablutions, incense to cloud the mercy seat, bulls, rams and goats. The slightly confused description of Leviticus 16 (a ram or two appear but play no role) depicts an abattoir: the bull is slaughtered, sacrificed, its blood sprinkled on the mercy seat and the remains burnt outside the camp; lots are cast over the goats, one ending up with the same fate as the bull, but the other becomes the scapegoat, upon which is laid the sins of the people before it is led out into the wilderness by a man designated for the task. When that man reaches the zone outside the camp, he lets the goat go to meet the demon of the jagged precipice, turns and washes his clothes and himself before re-entering the camp.

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[30] David A. Clines (ed.), *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (vol. 6; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2007) p. 326.

I would like to make three observations about this paradigmatic text. First, and obviously, the focus is the community and its survival, which is ensured by trying to banish everything perceived to threaten that survival. Second, note the obsession over sin – three times synonyms are used in the Hebrew (translated as iniquities, transgressions and sins) – as well as the careful attention to ensuring that the goat does not run free within the camp, for a man designated for the task must lead the goat outside the camp. Third, the ritual has more than a passing connection to Genesis 2–3. The garden becomes the camp, which also has a flaw within which must be banished so that the camp itself does not implode. The difference is that in the story of the garden we follow the scapegoat (Gen. 3.23–4) out of the garden, never to hear about goings-on within that boring idyll, whereas in Leviticus 16 we stay in the camp and imagine all manner of terrors for the goat.

However, let me stress another feature that will become important soon enough. The ritual of Leviticus takes place not in the city of the despot but in the wilderness. The text has not a temple but a tabernacle, not a city but a camp, not a citizen body but a mobile nomad band (or perhaps a post-signifying group of escapees, as we see below). Deleuze and Guattari have taken a text that concerns the nomadic wanderings of the Israelites in the desert and made it a central reference for the despotic state with its city and temple. In their interpretational shift, nomads and the despot have merged together. The nomads have come into the city, no longer outside but inside.

Following the scapegoat

Before I return to that point, let me follow Deleuze and Guattari further, for they follow the scapegoat out of the temple and then out of the city (or camp). Here they break with the text's own concern, which is to ensure the continued viability of the community itself. But the community is not of interest. Instead, it is the 'line of flight' of the scapegoat, a leitmotif in the politics of resistance championed by Deleuze and Guattari. Cutting across the signifying circles and centralized signifier of the despotic regime, the goat flees headlong into the desert. It embodies all that the despotic signifying system is not, all that is threatening and foreign. Deleuze and Guattari may

seem to overload the biblical text, but a closer look reveals a more detailed exegesis. In the same way that the sins, transgressions and iniquities bear down upon the goat with the weight of repetition in the biblical text, so also do Deleuze and Guattari spin out the implications of the 'sins' laid upon the goat:

> In the signifying regime, the scapegoat (*le bouc émissaire*) represents a new form of increasing entropy in the system of signs: it is charged with everything that was 'bad' in a given period, that is, everything that resisted signifying signs, everything that eluded (*échappé*) the referral from sign to sign through the different circles; it also assumes everything that was unable to recharge the signifier at its center and carries off everything that spills beyond (*ce qui déborde*) the outermost circle.[31]

Entropy, resistance, elusion, inability to recharge, spilling beyond – the three terms for transgression in the biblical text have become five. If we look beyond the semiotic rush of their interpretation, a significant point emerges: what is so often presented as sin or transgression in the Hebrew Bible, against Yahweh and the despotic ruler (Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, etc.), is actually rebellion. Such insurrection must be banished or crushed, for it perpetually threatens to overthrow the system itself.

At this point, another feature of Deleuze and Guattari's approach becomes important for understanding the tension between the despot and the scapegoat: the distinction between deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Developed first in *Anti-Oedipus*, it is assumed in the arguments of *A Thousand Plateaus*. The prior moment of territorialization appears with the tribe, which attributes the earth as the source of all the material flows of production through a process of mythical tracing or territorialization. This process begins with the bodily marks – tattoos, incisions, removal of small bodily items and so on – of initiation rituals. These markings relate directly to the kinship group, which is then traced out upon the earth through elaborate mythical stories. The earth, or particular regions immanent with spiritual power, becomes the

[31] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 116.

full realization of the body that has been so marked. By contrast, the despot deterritorializes the tribal codes, removing them from the earth. But the despot does not stop here, for the material flows are then reterritorialized, inscribed on his body as the source of all production. Thus, all parts of the despot's empire become parts of his body; for instance, those who labour for him are his hands, spies are his eyes and so on. Now we may connect this process with my earlier comments concerning signification, for here, with the divine body of the despot, does full signification take place. That is, signifiers are lined up, with one-to-one correspondence. They are thereby flattened or bi-univocalized.

How does the scapegoat relate to this triad? It is a process of deterritorialization, one that now responds to the despot's reterritorialized regime. Except to put it like that is not quite correct. The despotic signifying regime is actually a tension between deterritorialization and reterritorialization (see the previous paragraph), where deterritorialization is the moment of resistance that the despot continually tries to overcome in order to gain control. The scapegoat is, therefore, the mark of that resistance, when deterritorialization is not so much overcome as expelled from the reterritorializing body. Now the descriptions of the scapegoat pile upon one another: cutting through to the wilderness versus the multiple circularity of signs; anus versus face, or defacement versus faciality; sorcerer versus priest, or curse versus blessing, or the inability to interpret versus endless interpretation; in sum, the despotic regime versus flight. It is all too easy to become mesmerized and then snared within the trap of Deleuze and Guattari's language, so let me put it this way: the tension at the heart of the despotic regime is embodied in the tension between the despot and the scapegoat, between ultimate control and its unravelling.

In other words, the scapegoat is not necessarily external to the despotic regime. Indeed, it cannot be external, for the tension is what constitutes the despotic regime. Deleuze and Guattari admit as much:

> It incarnates that line of flight the signifying system cannot tolerate, in other words, an absolute deterritorialization; the regime must block a line of this kind or define it in an entirely negative fashion precisely because it exceeds the degree of

> deterritorialization of the signifying sign, however high it may be … Anything that threatens to put the system to flight will be killed or put to flight itself.[32]

Already they admit that the scapegoat is the intolerable reality that the system must both expel and without which it cannot exist. The terrible truth for the despotic regime is that the scapegoat is one of us. Two further points reinforce this truth. First, before their account of the expulsion of the scapegoat, Deleuze and Guattari trace the process of humiliation and torture of one who is the counter-body (*contre-corps*) of the despot.[33] Yet, both body and counter-body, the one preserved and the one tortured, are one and the same despot. The two are distinguished in the very process by which they are connected more closely. This reality is signalled by the fact that the king himself – the bearer of both bodies – undergoes rituals of humiliation that seek to torture the counter-body. Second, in an analogous fashion, the narrative of the scapegoat in Leviticus 16 also has two bodies, two goats. Unfortunately, Deleuze and Guattari skip by this point too quickly. If they had paused a little with the narrative itself, they would have realized that the two goats, one blessed and sacrificed and the other cursed and cast out, signal this bond between despot and scapegoat, the body and counter-body that are in fact constitutive of the system itself.

The outcome: Leviticus 16 indicates that resistance, revolution, line of flight are part and parcel of the despotic regime of signs. The fleeing scapegoat is not merely produced by the system and thereby expelled since it constitutes a fundamental threat; no, the system is unimaginable without this challenge. The despotic regime can function only in terms of a contradiction between despot and scapegoat, a contradiction which the regime seeks to overcome but which will also lead to its breaking apart.

Thus far, I have focused on the internal tension signalled by the scapegoat, but I have not yet followed the scapegoat out of

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[32] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 116.

[33] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, pp. 115–16.

the camp. Our focus on the unfortunate caprine has established that it marks a tension internal to the despotic state, a tension that comes to its height in the scapegoat of Leviticus 16. But let me now jump on the goat, along with the intimate Frenchmen, as it flees from the camp and towards the wilderness where *Azazel* dwells by the jagged precipice. It becomes the post-signifying regime in its own right (in contrast to both the counter-signifying regime of the nomads and the signifying regime of the despot). Indeed, this is precisely the focus of most of that fascinating chapter in *A Thousand Plateaus*.

At this moment, Deleuze and Guattari's interpretation would seem to ride out of the biblical text, on the back of the goat that similarly disappears. It passes 'outside the camp', where the impure or unclean are sent for a time (Lev. 13.36), where the offal from sacrifices is taken (Exod. 39.14; Lev. 4.12, 21), and where the goat ventures.[34] But this is only an initial impression, for as soon as we trot into the wilderness we meet none other than Moses! Now he has fled from the despotic face of Pharaoh and the fugitive people become the scapegoat. Now the Ark of the Covenant becomes crucial, for it is the sign of the scapegoat, 'a sign or packet of signs' which has detached 'from the irradiating circular network' of the despot.[35] And now a host of biblical and other intertexts appear, each of them scapegoats, packets of signs: prophets, Cain, Jonah, even Jesus, all of them fleeing despotic regimes, the symbol of which becomes the Tower of Babel. Soon these multiple lines of flight spill into Jewish and Christian history, with the Reformation, Luther and the devil, only to run further, to Descartes and even Althusser and references beyond any religious register at all.

I would like to grasp hold of Deleuze and Guattari before they run around madly in their effort to escape and ask them a few questions. To begin with, what has happened to the scapegoat? It certainly has not run off just yet, but it has undergone a transformation. Whereas within the despotic regime it had a purely negative value, expelled with all that would threaten that state,

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[34] See further Mark George, *Israel's Tabernacle as Social Space* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 113–14.

[35] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 121.

now it gains a positive value. Why? The scapegoat becomes – for now – the sign of a people with a new subjectivity. It is of course the Jewish people, who gain an identity by appropriating the scapegoat as their own: misfortune, grievance, exile, all with the fragile and mobile temple (either as tabernacle or as destroyed). The implications for the logic of the scapegoat are profound: there can be no new scapegoat, for they are the scapegoat; the god hides his face; punishment becomes indefinitely postponed; and betrayal becomes a leitmotif. This appropriation of suffering and punishment, albeit postponed, defines this new subjectivity as passional.

What about Moses? Did we not meet him a while ago as the prophetic nomad leader? Does he not command the war machine with its numbering and its devastating weapons? Yes, of course, but Deleuze and Guattari are quick to point out that this post-signifying regime is intimately related to the counter-signifying regime of the nomad war machine. The two regimes intermingle, elements of the war machine are present, and indeed the nomadic side has a profound influence on the new line of flight. Similarly, both nomads and scapegoats, both counter-signifying regime and post-signifying regime, have a constant tendency to revert to despotism, either as a longing for Egypt or as a desire to establish their own state with its king and priesthood.

This point brings me back to the question that has persisted throughout this chapter: is this post-signifying regime, this line of flight, really external, really an escape from the despotic regime? Deleuze and Guattari would like to think so, that it offers a troubled way out, but it has become difficult indeed to maintain that line. Obviously, clinging to the back of the scapegoat ensures that we can draw a line not merely out of the constitutive contradiction in the despotic regime but all the way back again. And it is not so much a tendency to fall back on the regime from which they have escaped as a recognition that they cannot escape it at all. For instance, in the biblical narratives, Egypt is not necessarily that evil realm of oppression, but it too is a land flowing with milk and honey, a land of leeks, lentils, cucumbers and fleshpots, a promised land in its own way.[36] Deleuze and Guattari admit as

[36] Roland Boer, '蔥、扁豆與肉鍋—作為象徵空間的埃及 (Leeks, Lentils and Fleshpots: Egypt as a Symbolic Space)', *Hermeneutics and the Reading of the Bible*

much, pointing out that there is no pure regime, that the regimes constantly combine in ever-new formations, or are able to be translated into one another.

However, the most significant admission comes via an apparent detour into psychiatry (apparent, since Deleuze and Guattari insist that regimes should not be fixed in any one time and place). So, in the spirit of the scapegoat, let me follow them here for a moment. They trace the development in psychiatry of two types of madness. In the first group, people seem entirely mad but are not: the psychotic Schreber of Freud's famous text was able to keep his life and wealth together, able to distinguish the different circles of his life. In the second group, they seem perfectly normal but are not; this is manifested in outbursts of quarrels, arsons, assassinations and seeking of redress.[37] So the psychiatrist is caught, arguing on the one hand for leniency, understanding and open asylums, and on the other for surveillance and high-security asylums. These two types are, in *A Thousand Plateaus,* our 'paranoid, signifying, despotic regime of signs and a passional or subjective, postsignifying, authoritarian regime'.[38] The symbols of both are none other than Pharaoh and Moses!

This detour through psychiatry brings them around to what I have been arguing throughout this chapter. This opposition 'lies at the heart of the constitution of the psychiatrist', so much that 'psychiatry was not at all constituted in relation to the concept of madness, or even as a modification of that concept, but rather by *its split in these two opposite directions* (*avec sa dissolution dans ces deux directions opposées*)'.[39] Just to make sure we have not missed the point, they note, 'And is that not our own double image, all of ours: seeming mad without being it, then being it without seeming

(Ken-Pa Chin and Samuel Pin-Cheong Chia (eds); Taipei: CCLM Publishing, 2008), pp. 83–99; Diana Lipton, *Longing for Egypt and Other Unexpected Biblical Tales* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008).

[37] Sigmund Freud, 'Psychoanalytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides) (Schreber)', *The Pelican Freud Library* (vol. 9; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), pp. 113–223.

[38] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 121.

[39] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 120.

it?'[40] So also with the signifying and post-signifying regimes; so also with Pharaoh and Moses, despot and scapegoat.

Conclusion

This reading of Exodus 18 and Leviticus 16 is arguably one of the most original I have encountered for some time, both in terms of the recalibrating of Marxist criticism and in terms of the unique insights into the texts. However, a common question raised with such readings is whether Deleuze and Guattari (or any other interpreter not trained as a biblical critic) really need the text to make their point? Surely they could have used other material to make exactly the same argument. Does the biblical material become mere grist for their mill? This question makes some very questionable assumptions. The first is theological, namely, that one must read a genuine position out of the text, through exegesis. The obvious response is that no reading engages in pure exegesis. This is a methodological fiction that biblical critics need to justify a sense of uniqueness. Second, the simple fact is that Deleuze and Guattari *do* engage with biblical texts such as Exodus 18 and Leviticus 16. For this reason alone, their interpretation is worth attention, no matter what the motivation or reason for doing so. This fact means that there is something significant about the way the biblical texts come into contact with their philosophical framework, how the texts influence that framework and how their approach reveals potential new insights.

These insights involve the nomadic war band of Moses and the Israelites, which Deleuze and Guattari designate the counter-signifying regime; the despotic signifying regime of the palace and temple; and then the scapegoat, which intersects both with the Israelites fleeing Egypt and the nomadic war machine we met earlier. I have argued for three significant features that arise from the interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari. First, the tensions between these regimes are as much internal as external. Thus, the resistance to the despotic state is also a feature internal to that

[40] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, pp. 120–1.

state. The doubled scapegoat is merely the initial signal of that internal tension, with one goat sacrificed in the temple (tabernacle) and the other banished to the wilderness. It appears above all in the tension between the despot's divine face and the goat's arse. The two face off against one another in a way that reveals such an internal tension. Indeed, the very possibility of the despotic state is predicated on that tension. The implication is that the Bible and the religions that claim it as a sacred text do not have a default setting for cosy and corrupt deals with power and the state, even though it often seems to be the case. Instead, there is an internal dynamic that constantly tempts them to make such trysts as well as oppose them. Second, instead of a binary contrast between power and resistance, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that modes of opposition are multiple, overlapping and frequently mixed. In this case, the nomadic war band and the scapegoat indicate such multiplicity (along with a regime I have not discussed in this chapter – the pre-signifying regime found with the tribe). Finally, the various regimes, especially those involved in resistance, are never pure. They constantly intermingle. Thus, the counter-signifying regime meets the post-signifying regime; that is, as soon as the scapegoat flees the compound, it becomes not only the Israelites fleeing the despot in Egypt, but it also meets and joins forces with the nomadic war band. Against the penchant for congealing resistance into identifiable groups – people, language, place, class, political party, faction or what have you – the modes of opposition are far more fluid, constantly reforming into new assemblages.

Summary

- Deleuze and Guattari develop the idea that resistance is multiple rather than singular.
- They describe the despotic state as the signifying regime.
- One form of resistance is the mobile war party of nomads (counter-signifying regime) found in Exodus 18.
- Another form is the scapegoat, which also becomes the Israelites in the wilderness, of Leviticus 16.

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Terry Eagleton: The class struggles in Ruth

Terry Eagleton is probably the most widely read Marxist among those that appear in this book. His notoriety has much to do with the palatability and range of his prolific writing. That he has recovered in recent years his earlier interests in the Roman Catholic Left probably assists in such accessibility. His Marxism insists on the central questions of class and revolutionary politics, although I wish to draw upon his reflections on gender and ethnicity as well. After outlining some key points on class, I indicate how class and ethnicity, and then class and gender, relate to one another by focusing on two of Eagleton's literary interpretations: 'Heathcliff and the Great Hunger' and *The Rape of Clarissa*. Subsequently, I turn to the biblical text of Ruth. Obviously, gender and ethnicity are there in the text, but class may be a little harder to find. Thus, the burden of my analysis of Ruth is to deploy Eagleton to show precisely how class emerges from the text.

Class, ethnicity and gender

Class, and the closely related class conflict, are staples of any Marxist criticism worthy of the name, although Eagleton has insisted most strenuously on these categories. He has also been involved in debates over ethnicity and feminism, especially in

relation to English colonial domination of Ireland, and in relation to materialist and psychoanalytic feminisms that have sought to return gender to Western Marxism's agenda (it was a crucial issue in earlier Marxisms[1]). I will deal with ethnicity and gender soon, but first some comments on class are needed.

The emphasis on class operates at a number of levels for Eagleton. To begin with, by class he means both objective and subjective factors. Objectively, class designates the difference between those who work to produce goods and those who extract a surplus from those goods but do not produce them. In other words, the former do not own the means of production but do all the work, while the latter own those means but do not work. This objective difference is manifested in division of labour, which operates in complex patterns of distinctions between male and female, mind and body, city and country, material and immaterial wealth. The subjective dimension involves a consciousness of belonging to a particular class. That consciousness includes a complex web of cultural assumptions, modes of speech, social codes, world outlook and religion. Most significantly, class consciousness is determined by a class opponent, the differences with which are marked by opposing assumptions of one's role and importance within production, and by the cultural assumptions each holds. For instance, peasants regard the class that extracts their produce, whether through taxes or direct appropriation (plunder), as exploitative and cruel overlords, while those who extract such surplus regard peasants as ignorant, lazy, earthy, uncultured and surly.

Eagleton's insistence on class may also be seen as the result of his living and working in the same society that was the basis for Marx's analysis in *Capital,* albeit some 150 years later. For here class is an obvious feature of social relations, marked out sharply in terms of language, culture, politics and above all in working conditions. That is not to say that class does not exist elsewhere; yet in England, and in other places in Europe with a longer history of the shift from feudalism to capitalism, one can make a class identification the moment someone opens his or her mouth, if not

[1] August Bebel, *Woman Under Socialism* (trans. Daniel De Leon; Whitefish: Kessinger, 2007 [1903]); Alexandra Kollontai, *Selected Writings* (trans. Alix Holt; New York: W. W. Norton, 1980).

before. So Eagleton in his funeral oration for Raymond Williams, his teacher:

> I found myself marooned within a student body where everyone seemed to be well over six foot and brayed rather than spoke … Williams looked and spoke more like a countryman than a don, and had a warmth and simplicity of manner which contrasted sharply with the suave, offhand style of the upper middle-class establishment.[2]

It is no surprise then that Eagleton's political commitment is to class politics, and that his literary criticism and class conflict are the central categories of his literary method.

Class, however, interacts with a number of other forms of division and oppression, including ethnicity and gender. At times (and unfortunately) debates turn on apparently irreducible foundations. Conventional Marxists, if squeezed sufficiently, will not renounce class, however much else may have been relinquished on the way. Post-Marxists may be as ready to give up the faith as any Quisling, but Eagleton is hardly one of those. However, for those committed to analyzing ethnicity as well as feminism, what cannot be relinquished or made into a secondary phenomenon are the questions of race and gender. So what comes first, class, ethnicity or gender? To frame the question in this way – the assertion of one or the other as the philosophical first principle – is of little use. One response to this impasse is to include the other neglected categories within one's critical and political inventory, so much so that we now have a new sub-discipline known as 'intersectionality', where class, race and gender are joined by queerness, ecocriticism, post-colonialism and so on.[3] Yet this inclusionary move, in some form

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[2] Terry Eagleton, 'Introduction', *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives* (Terry Eagleton (ed.); Cambridge: Polity, 1989), pp. 1–11 (1).

[3] Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color', *Stanford Law Review* 43, 6 (1991), pp. 1241–99; Jennifer Nash, 'Rethinking Intersectionality', *Feminist Review* 89, 1 (2008), pp. 1–15. An earlier version is the argument by Laclau and Mouffe: in light of post-structuralist criticisms of master narratives and essentialism, a re-evaluation is needed of older forms of political theory and action from the Left. This 'micro-politics', the development of a host of small political pressure groups, is a sign of

of common front, loses both the specific political force of each approach and sounds a little too much like liberal multiculturalism. So a substantial part of my introduction to Eagleton will watch for how he deals with this question.

Class and ethnicity: Heathcliff and the Great Hunger

In order to bring out the connection between class and ethnicity, I would like to discuss in a little detail Eagleton's interpretation of *Wuthering Heights*.[4] Here he attempts to show how both class and ethnicity are crucial to the organization of the text and yet how they are concealed. For Eagleton, the key to *Wuthering Heights* is the Great Famine in Ireland, the result of a deliberate and genocidal act of refusing aid by the imperial English government. In this light, Heathcliff is initially an allegorical personification of the Irish, especially the working Irish peasantry. His ethnic identity is actually concealed through his class identity, so Eagleton's point that he represents the Irish is an effort to overcome such concealment. As for class, it too is concealed by means of the subtle and bewildering shifts throughout the novel, so Eagleton's interpretation sets out to identify those shifts: 'Heathcliff starts out as an image of the famished Irish immigrant, becomes a landless labourer set to work in the Heights, and ends up as a symbol of the constitutional nationalism of the Irish parliamentary party.'[5]

Initially, Heathcliff appears as impoverished Irish rural labourer, with all that is represented by that class. It is not for nothing that he is taken in at the estate of the Heights, where Nature dominates, for he is dark-skinned, earthy, filthy and starving. Unable to break

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a new political scene in which various groups move into alliances based on their drive for radical equality. Class is therefore suspect since it operates with essentialist assumptions, but so are the older identity groups who now need to reconstitute themselves in an anti-essentialist fashion. Ernesto Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Democratic Socialist Politics* (London: Verso, 1985).

[4] Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London: Verso, 1995), pp. 1–26.

[5] Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture*, p. 19.

the class boundaries and unite with his love, Catherine (from the other estate, the Grange), Heathcliff sets off to appropriate the outer bearing and weapons of the ruling class (at heart he remains a boor) in order to take over both estates, the Heights and the Grange, only to die before he can enjoy it all.

Yet, Heathcliff is not merely transformed rural working class, for he is the threat of the middle classes on the landed gentry, as well as the embodiment of the ruling class fear of revolution. He must be killed at the end of the novel, in order to overcome that fear. In all its complexity, Eagleton settles for Heathcliff as the allegory of the rural (Irish) revolution, in both its right and left forms, in its failure and near-triumph. 'From the gentry's standpoint, the novel recounts a tale of catastrophe just averted; from a radical viewpoint it records the loss of revolutionary hopes, now projected into a mythologized past but, like the ghosts of Catherine and Heathcliff, still capable of infiltrating and disturbing the present.'[6] It is this complex mode of interpretation, in which class and ethnicity are both uncovered and untangled, that I will deploy in my reading of Ruth.

Class and gender: The rape of Clarissa

As for the question of class and gender, I turn to Eagleton's brief monograph, *The Rape of Clarissa*,[7] an interpretation of Samuel Richardson's epistolary novels, *Clarissa*, as well as *Pamela* and *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*.[8] Eagleton's main thesis is that Richardson's three novels were central to the emergence of a dominant bourgeois ideology. In the long transition from feudalism to capitalism, the bourgeoisie – regarded at the time as crass and uncultured – enacted an ideological shift away from the overt power and violence of public male relations. Richardson was

[6] Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture*, p. 21.

[7] Terry Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

[8] Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa: Or, the History of a Young Lady* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986 [1747]); Samuel Richardson, *Pamela: Or, Virtue Rewarded* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1740]); Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (Farmington Hills: Gale Ecco, 2010 [1753]).

instrumental in this shift through leading what Eagleton calls the feminization of male relations. While *Pamela* (1740) is the first experiment, *Clarissa* (1747) foregrounds the moral and ideological bankruptcy of the older aristocracy, embodied in the libertine violence of Lovelace, who convinces Clarissa to elope with him. Clarissa herself, as far as Richardson is concerned, exhibits all the desirable feminine virtues – tenderness, purity, kindness, piety and so on. Her rape and murder by Lovelace is the last and desperate act of an old order, for in *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753) the full appropriation of feminine qualities by its protagonist, Grandison, takes place.

Eagleton is also interested in how Richardson's activity of writing itself intermeshes with his three texts, *Clarissa, Pamela* and *Sir Charles Grandison*. This practice operates with a profound contradiction that appears in its own way with Ruth as well. In a process comparable to the paradoxical way in which the 'new' values of love, choice of partner (by a woman) and companionship both enabled women to pick out their own husbands *and* rendered them completely dependent and bound to such a man within the emerging nuclear family, so also Richardson's practice of circulating drafts of his novels among a circle of educated women, for extended comment and revision, served to fetishize women as 'technicians of the heart'[9] through granting them a more authoritative and public voice. Undercutting the older forms of patriarchy, in which marriage was arranged and men assumed they knew what women wanted, was a newer form that was simultaneously better and worse. Richardson writes at the time when the transition from an open and vigorous patriarchy to its subtler bourgeois forms is under way. He exploited 'his literary powers to tighten his hold over women' (p. 13), fashioning an alternative to the patriarchal family. In short, the contradictions of Richardson's literary practice are those of the newly dominant bourgeoisie; a new father-daughter relationship that challenges older forms of sexual domination through comradeship; the canonization of women as specialists in sentiment at the moment of a substantial feminization of the mores of male bourgeois public relations.

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[9] Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson*, p. 13.

The specific situation may be different – the European eighteenth century – but the paradox of this shift is one that appears also in the book of Ruth:

> The 'exaltation' of women, while undoubtedly a partial advance in itself, also serves to shore up the very system which oppresses them. For the eighteenth-century woman, as indeed for women of any epoch, the pedestal is never very far from the pit.[10]

I am interested in the form of this paradox, in the way such a foregrounding actually serves to reinforce patterns of subjugation. I suspect that many biblical critics fall into the same trap with Ruth, seeing it as a woman's story that runs against the grain of the Hebrew Bible without noticing the systematic effacement of women throughout the text.

What does this mean for the relations between class and gender? On the one hand, gender becomes the code in which class conflict is fought out, serving to conceal that conflict and shift it onto gender. On the other hand, gender is the focus of these conflicts, which are just as much about gender as they are about class. Indeed, class becomes a particular feature of gender. Less the tension it might seem to be, I suggest that here we have a dialectic of class and gender, in which the two maintain their own specific concerns and yet cannot function without each other. Each interacts and yet resists complete absorption by the other. If we add ethnicity (see earlier), then the dialectic becomes a trialectic, with three analytic terms intersecting with one another while maintaining distinct identities. As far as my reading of Ruth is concerned, I follow

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[10] Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson*, p. 15. So also with Richardson's third and final effort, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*. For Eagleton, Grandison is a cipher of the class alliance of aristocracy and bourgeoisie in which the ideology of the latter – a mollified and subtler form of ruling class and patriarchal domination – wins through. Yet for Eagleton *Grandison* is a failure, showing all the contradictions of middle-class ideology: chastity, altruism, piety and pacificity produce a new male subject who subtly alters the structures of sexual oppression so that they remain in place, as powerful as ever: 'The contradiction of *Sir Charles Grandison* is that its blending of genders is inseparable from a synthesis of classes which simply reproduces sexual oppression.' Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson*, p. 101.

Eagleton's lead in drawing together class, ethnicity and gender, although I do so in terms of the trialectic I have just outlined. In particular, I am interested in patterns of concealment, in the ways any one of these items becomes a focus of the text and thereby functions as a mode of concealing the other two. In other words, I seek to bring together all three – class, gender and ethnicity – in a way that is thoroughly Marxist and yet does not enable class to become the ultimately determining instance.

The effacements of Ruth

In my reading of Ruth, I wish to answer three questions. Despite all the space that women occupy in the narrative, what function do they fulfil? What of the Moabite–Israelite distinction that has been discussed so much? Finally, does not Ruth occupy the lowest rung in the structure of work, gathering the leftovers after the reapers have been through the fields?

The path I tread bears the prints of those who have written on Ruth before me. Athalya Brenner has argued that the model which best describes Ruth is that of the foreign woman worker, common in Israel today.[11] Women come into Israel to work at the lowest-paid jobs – usually domestic – from countries where there is little work at all; because they are women and foreigners they fill the lowest-class stratum of unskilled workers. This is a finely balanced argument, much better than her earlier valorizations of Ruth as a woman's story,[12] since the questions of ethnicity and gender

[11] Athalya Brenner, 'Ruth as a Foreign Worker and the Politics of Exogamy', *Ruth and Esther* (Athalya Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)*, vol. 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), pp. 158–62.

[12] Adrien J. Bledstein, 'Female Companionships: If the Book of Ruth were Written by a Woman …', *A Feminist Companion to Ruth* (Athalya Brenner (ed.), *The Feminist Companion to the Bible*, vol. 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 116–33. In fact, most of the essays in the first *Feminist Companion to Ruth* (1993) follow this line, some suggesting female authorship. Bledstein, 'Female Companionships: If the Book of Ruth were Written by a Woman …'; Fokkelein Van Dijk–Hemmes, 'Ruth: A Product of Woman's Culture?', *A Feminist Companion to Ruth* (Athalya Brenner (ed.), *The Feminist Companion to the Bible*, vol. 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 134–9.

provide greater complexity for an implicit class analysis, and yet ethnicity and gender are not the determining factors of class. The catch is that Brenner does not offer a class analysis (hence my use of 'implicit'), notable more for her feminist criticism than any Marxist categories.

David Jobling's commentary on 1 Samuel divides the analysis into sections on class, gender and ethnicity.[13] This is one of the best and most astute commentaries I have read, partly because Jobling is interested in similar questions to me and studiously avoids the favouring of one category over another. However, the middle section on gender relies heavily on psychoanalysis, while the sections on class and ethnicity are less taken with psychoanalysis. In other words, where gender is an issue, psychoanalysis seems most appropriate, for they both speak of the individual and private, specialists in sentiment, to use Eagleton's phrase for the women of Richardson's circle. Yet, when the questions of class and ethnicity come to the fore, the modes of analysis move from the private to the public. Further, it does not seem to me that Jobling provides an adequate reflection on the interrelation between the three areas.

Identifying class

Before attempting precisely such a dialectical reading, I need to ask how class, gender and ethnicity work in the narrative of Ruth. In this respect, the story of Ruth attempts to deal with a problem: who is the mother of Obed? He is not simply Ruth's child, for the story closes with the women of the neighbourhood saying, 'A son has been born to Naomi' (Ruth 4.17). Then the narrative closes with a male genealogy from Perez to David, in which Boaz and Obed feature. In other words, the story faces the problem of succession, of transition from male to male, when there is no male to continue the line. What happens when only women are left?

As for ethnicity, the ambiguity of 'Moab' runs through the text and beyond. The Moabites are, for the Hebrew Bible, the descendants of Lot and his first-born daughter (Gen. 19.32–3, 37).

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[13] David Jobling, *1 Samuel* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998).

In this denigrating tale the Ammonites descend from Lot and his younger daughter (Gen. 19.34–6, 38). Ruth is therefore one of this incestuous brood, a secondary part of the lines that tie in with Abraham. In Ruth itself the ambiguity of Moab continues.[14] Ruth and Orpah are Moabite wives of now-dead Israelite men, Mahlon and Chilion. Ruth, whose Moabite identity is so much part of her character that it becomes an epithet, follows Naomi back to Judah, but it is she who marries Boaz and produces a child in the curiously 'impure' genealogical line that leads back to David.

Class, Eagleton's most favoured category, is less obvious in Ruth, but only because it has been less of a focus in criticism than questions of gender and ethnicity. Yet the narrative, especially in Chapter 2, cannot be understood without a notion of class. As I outlined earlier, class is one of a cluster of terms in Marxist theory that explores the relations between productive and non-productive labour: those who control the means of production extract, in order to live, the surplus product from those who work for them but do not own the means of production. Within this basic description a host of particular variations exist in any one political formation (see Marx's famous analysis in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*[15]), so much so that the Marxist category of class becomes the name of a problem that must be addressed afresh on each occasion.

Let us see how class appears. The return of Naomi and Ruth to Bethlehem takes place at the 'beginning of the barley harvest' (Ruth 1.22), a crucial temporal marker that sets up the sequence that follows. Ruth begins, at her own suggestion, the task of gleaning after the reapers of the harvest. In the hierarchy of labour she is a long way from the wealthy Boaz, owner of the means of production: between them come the young man in charge of the reapers and the reapers themselves. Ruth follows the reapers in the field (Ruth 2.3). As far as the story is concerned, there is but one field in which the reapers work, for the text mentions that part of it belonged to Boaz. The word for reapers is a masculine plural (*haqqotserim*), although this does not necessarily refer exclusively

[14] Is this a sign of textual nervousness concerning Israelite identity? See Roland Boer, *Last Stop Before Antarctica: The Bible and Postcolonialism in Australia* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), pp. 109–33.

[15] Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', *Marx and Engels Collected Works* (vol. 11; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1979 [1852]), pp. 99–197.

to men. The suggestion is strong, however, that the young men (*hanne'arim*, Ruth 2.9) are the reapers, but the mention of 'my young women' (*na'arothay*) by Boaz (2.8) points to female workers in the field. Are they reapers also? Ruth 2.23 suggests most clearly that the young women glean rather than reap. The alternative term, *shifkhah*, which designates menial service, concubinage and connection to a female master, indicates that the women workers occupy the lowest rung in the work hierarchy (see 2.13). However, the ambiguity over *na'arim/ne'aroth*, young men/young women, requires more specific signals in the text concerning any division of labour according to gender. The masculine plural is no sure sign of gender identification. Is it the case, then, that the gender distinction between young men and young women only takes place in the Hebrew Bible when the division of labour becomes an issue? As for Ruth, she is also *hanna'arah* (Ruth 2.5, 6), clearly one of the labourers, yet she is below even the lowest group, a female servant (*shifkhah*) who is not like one of Boaz's female servants (see 2.13). Only after Naomi's instruction does she join the group of young women gleaning (2.22–3).

In this microcosm of class, the one who mediates between the reapers and gleaners on the one side and Boaz on the other is a singular 'young man' – often glossed as 'servant' – who is in charge of the reapers (Ruth 2.5). What about Boaz? Like Grandison in Richardson's novels, Boaz controls the means of production and for him the rest labour. His wealth, the public activities of exchange at the 'gate' (4.1), his age, the eating and drinking at the threshing floor (3.3–7) and the instructions given to his reapers as to how they should work (2.15,16), all indicate a man in charge of the means of production and labour. Only in this context can he utter pieties – 'Yahweh bless you' (2.4) or 'May you be blessed by Yahweh' (3.10; a more indirect phrase for Ruth) – and appear incongruously generous (see below). But the most obvious signal is that nowhere does Boaz engage in any work as such, nowhere is he involved in the production of the necessary items for human existence. In other words, he lives off the surplus labour of those who do work. The only thing he does is tell others what to do: note the variations on the imperative and jussive in nearly all of his reported speech in the text.

A complication to this whole structure of social class lies with Naomi, for she is not factored into the economic equation of the

narrative. Once back in Bethlehem, she remains in domestic space. Her role for the rest of the story is to give Ruth directives (3.1–4: like Boaz, Naomi is given to imperatives and jussives), encourage Ruth in her decisions (2.2), utter pieties (2.19, 20), question Ruth's daily activities (2.20), urge her on in the back-breaking work of gleaning (2.22) and gain ownership of Ruth's child (4.16), which is then recognized by the other women (4.14, 15, 17). Both Naomi and Boaz use the familiar 'my daughter' (1.11, 12; 2.2, 8), a distinct marker in the hierarchy of kin structures. Naomi is then most like Boaz in this story, for she also does no work: she controls Ruth's actions, directing her to go out and glean, seduce a man on the threshing floor and bear a child. This legitimate Judahite is another who lives from the surplus produced by those who work.

Kinship, inheritance and the exchange of women

A valid objection to my reading is that the absence of Naomi's work is characteristic of the repression of women's work in domestic space. Surely Naomi engages in tasks of cleaning and cooking while Ruth is outside the domestic sphere, doing the work that does register in the text. And is not Naomi the one who cares for the son after he is born? Boaz, by contrast, controls the means of production to which and to whom Naomi herself is subject. At one level this absence in the text signals that Naomi is yet another enabler of the necessary patriliny with which the story closes. There are, however, other signals in the text that indicate the deeper complicity of Naomi and Boaz.

To begin with, there is the question of kinship, which devolves into that of patriliny. The story begins with the Judahite credentials of Elimelech, Mahlon and Chilion, 'Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah' (1.2). The issue returns in the narrator's note in 2.1: 'Now Naomi had a relative (*moda'* in *Qere*, 'relative', and *meyyuda'* in *Ketib*, 'acquaintance'[16]) of her husband's, a powerful man (*gibor*), of the family of Elimelech, and his name was Boaz.' After this note,

[16] Although both words come from *ydh*, to know, the *Ketib* is interesting here, for it designates merely someone known, an acquaintance, rather than a relative.

Ruth's encounter with Boaz is inevitable, although the economic factor of the division of labour becomes crucial in order to allow the connection to be made. Time and again the kinship of Naomi and Boaz recurs (2.3, 20; 3.2, 12), until the whole question needs to be resolved by the transaction at the gate with the unnamed 'redeemer', who is closer to Naomi than Boaz.

The connection of blood is but the mark of a deeper allegiance, of which the dealings in the fourth chapter of Ruth comprise the first element. Here the public transactions of men over possessions and women enable the initial steps towards a narrative resolution. The issue concerns who will act as *go'el* (redeemer) for Elimelech. The concentration of various forms of the verb and noun that form part of the semantic cluster of *g'l* (3.13, 4.1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8) – to redeem lost property or inheritance – indicate a distinct transaction as the solution to the narrative problem of inheritance. Yet, when Boaz and the 'redeemer' in question have sat down together with other men, the surprise in store is that the key issue is a field share (*kheleqat hassadeh*) that belonged 'to our brother Elimelech' (4.3).[17] The negotiations begin and the dealings remain at the level of land. But when the nominated 'redeemer' agrees to acquire the land, Boaz finally mentions Ruth: 'On the day you acquire the land from the hand of Naomi and from Ruth, the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, you acquire to restore the name of the dead to his inheritance' (4.5). At this the 'redeemer' withdraws his offer and allows Boaz to become the 'redeemer' of Elimelech, thereby relinquishing the legal duty of the next of kin to take the wife of the one who died so that he would not compromise his own inheritance.

A couple of items need to be noted in the syntactical structure of Ruth 4.5. To begin with, the Hebrew text stumbles at a couple of points, suggesting that Ruth causes some problems for the transaction at the gate. Her syntactical place in the sentence is unclear. On the one hand, the phrase, 'from the hand of Naomi and from Ruth' (*miyyad na'omi ume'eth ruth*), appears balanced as the indirect object of the infinitive construct 'on the day of your

[17] I have translated this as 'field share', since the standard pattern in rural agriculture in ancient Southwest Asia was not the ownership of distinct pieces of land but a regular (annual or biannual) reallocation of field shares between the village commune. See further Roland Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*.

acquiring' (*beyom qenothekha*). On the other hand, the *me'eth* before 'Ruth' is different from *miyyad*, 'from the hand of', before 'Naomi'. Of course, the problem, as the following verses make clear, is that Ruth is not the one from whom the property must be redeemed. And so commentators suggest, following the Vulgate, that the full *ume'eth* should be the same as verse 10: *wegam 'eth*, 'also (you buy… Ruth)'. In other words, they try to make Ruth the direct object of the next verb. This suggestion signals a problem in the text: the syntactical ambiguity hints at a possible inheritance from Naomi to Ruth, outside the control of men, and it is this threat that must be closed down by the convoluted transaction at the gate. Further, the *Qere/Ketib* for the second verb, *qanithah/ qanithi* – 'you acquire' or 'I acquire' – disrupts the sentence yet further. Is it that when the 'redeemer' acquires the land from the hand of Naomi and from Ruth, Boaz also restores the name of the dead to his inheritance? Or does Boaz acquire Ruth and the nominated redeemer acquire the land? Or is it as the *Qere* has it, that the one who redeems the land, along with Ruth, redeems the inheritance of the dead? Once again, Ruth disrupts the syntax of a sentence in which she is an object of exchange.

My second observation concerns the secondary status of Ruth to the 'field share' (*kheleqat hassadeh*), found in both Ruth 2.3 and 4.3. It is as though her inadvertent wandering, while gleaning, onto Boaz's 'field share' (2.3) inextricably ties her to the exchange of such shares (Elimelech's share to Boaz in Ruth 4.3). So close is the connection between women and land – as producers of children and food that men perpetually seek to control – that a metonymy creeps in, suggesting that Ruth herself is the 'field share' over which the men haggle. What is being exchanged here? Obviously a woman; indeed her initial status as an afterthought to the land is overturned by the surrounding narrative in which she is the prime object of exchange. The ritual of the sandal, with which Boaz walks on the land and at which Ruth sleeps, makes explicit the purchase of both (4.9).

The class complicity of Naomi

By contrast, Naomi takes a very different role from Ruth. Although the exchange of field share and woman takes place between men,

Naomi is the one who passes over the inheritance. She is clearly not an item of exchange, but rather one who engages in exchange. On three occasions (4.3, 5, 9), each time in the reported speech of Boaz, Naomi is mentioned: once as subject of the verb (4.3) and twice as indirect object (4.5, 9). In the presence of the elders, the exchange actually takes place between Naomi and Boaz, even though she is physically absent. From Naomi he acquires 'all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon' (4.9). And this, as verse 10 elaborates, includes Ruth: he has not, as the usual formula would have it, 'taken' (*lqkh*) her. Instead, he says: 'and also Ruth, the Moabitess, the woman of Mahlon, I have acquired (*qanithi*) for myself as a woman'. Naomi is the one who sells Ruth and the land; it now becomes all (*kol*) that belonged to Elimelech, Mahlon and Chilion (4.9).

Naomi turns out to be one of the men with whom she exchanges various items, including the foreign woman. But this is not all, for now the question of ethnicity – or, more preferably, social boundaries – makes it clear that this is not merely exchange between (honorary) men. I am going to argue that such economic activity may take place, as far as the narrative is concerned, between Israelites. They appear in this text as non-workers, as those who live off the surplus produced by others and exchange it among themselves.

Before I consider this more closely, I want to return to Chapter 2, where further complicity between Naomi and Boaz takes place. I have already noted that they act in a similar fashion, controlling and directing Ruth's actions. But what interests me now is the apparent generosity of Boaz. It begins with his order to Ruth to remain with his own 'young women' (2.8), which includes his report of the instructions to the young men not to molest her – as though this was the norm – and to drink from what the young men have drawn (2.9). Ruth herself comes to the party, uttering her thanks: 'May I find favour in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your female servant, though I am not one of your female servants' (2.13). Not only does Boaz, in all his largesse, talk to her directly and offer her food (2.14), but he orders the young men to give her as much help as possible. They are to allow her to glean among the sheaves and to pull out some grains from the bundles so she can gather more (2.15–16). This incredible generosity – a virtue only for the wealthy, as Eagleton

points out with respect to Grandison – finds ready support from Naomi, who responds to the information that Ruth has gleaned in Boaz's field: 'Blessed be he by Yahweh, whose kindness has not forsaken the living and the dead' (2.20). The elision between Yahweh's and Boaz's 'kindness' is not fortuitous in light of my comments about class earlier (is not Boaz closest to God?). But what we miss in the uniform chorus of Boaz and Naomi, as well as the smoothness of the narrative that lines up such generosity with Yahweh, is the sheer effrontery of the acts of both Boaz and Naomi. Not only is Ruth already engaged in the most back-breaking labour, but both Boaz and Naomi enhance the working conditions – within strict limits – in order to make her work harder. Thus, as the 'young man' in charge of the reapers says: 'she has continued from early morning until now' (2.7). And all this before Boaz shows any 'generosity'. Her work credentials are clear, so that by the time Boaz provides more incentive to work, 'she gleaned in the field until evening' (2.17). After all this labour, she beats what she has gleaned into an ephah of barley. This work is for one day only: after Naomi's encouragement, Ruth gleans for the whole season, 'until the end of the barley and wheat harvests' (2.23). This is hardly benevolence, but more like pure exploitation.

It seems, then, that Naomi and Boaz have multiple ties, in terms of kinship, economic exchange and the exploitation of labour. But to what end? A hint of this purpose appears already in Chapter 2, when Boaz offers Ruth bread and wine in which to dip the bread: 'So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed her the parched grain, and she ate and was satisfied, and she had some remaining' (2.14). If this grain that is left over is ambiguous, the 'gift' after their night together makes it a little clearer. Boaz orders her to hold out her mantle (*hammitpakhath*); he places in it six measures of barley, having 'laid it upon her' before she goes out into the city (3.15). Apart from the play on garments (see 3.3, 9) and uncovering (3.4, 7), is this to be understood as a bridal price? If so, it is miserly one. Or is it a signal of her more significant productive role later, with grain in the mantle a metaphor for child in the womb? I suggest that here the connection between the 'field share' and Ruth in 2.3 and 4.3 has its sense, for the relation between women and land is not merely that they are exchange items. Rather, the leftover parched grain and the six measures of barley placed in her mantle (so that she was virtually naked) signal a deeper association between the

productivity of land and women: both produce 'fruit' for others to appropriate. Ruth labours on the land for the gleanings of barley in a way comparable to her production of a son, both burdens and 'gifts' from Boaz.

There remains the closure of the book's narrative. The blessing of 'all the people' – note the expansion from the ten elders of 4.2 – 'who were at the gate' (4.11) concerns productivity, now in terms of child-bearing. Not any form of child-bearing: the bearing of sons like Rachel and Leah (although Leah also bore Dinah), 'who together built up the house of Israel' (4.11), and the house of Perez, born of the somewhat dubious union of Tamar and Judah (Genesis 38), is like that of Ruth and Boaz. Nevertheless, the result is what counts: 'because of the seed (*hazzera'*) that Yahweh will give you from this young woman' (4.12). Ruth's purpose in the narrative is to produce 'seed', both the son to be born, Obed, and as the closing genealogy shows, *his* descendants. Note the word used again for Ruth: she is no longer the Moabitess but the 'young woman', the gleaner and worker from 2.5 and 6 (where only those who work are designated as 'young men' and 'young women'). Linguistically, at the moment of her imminent son-bearing, the terminology links her inextricably with her role as field-worker and gleaner.

However, in the narrative of conception and birth (a perspective from Boaz, for these moments neglect the long period of gestation) there is a curious twist. Boaz, now in conventional terms, 'takes' (*lqkh*) Ruth and she becomes his wife; Yahweh enables conception (not Boaz!) and she gives birth to a son (4.13). The narrative has, of course, been moving to this point, but Naomi has not had her last word. In a reversal of Naomi's bitter words in 1.20–1 at the dereliction by Yahweh, the women point out Yahweh's blessing for Naomi by means of Ruth: 'He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, has borne him' (4.15). Yet, Naomi is by no means restricted to uttering blessing; she also takes (*lqkh*) – the same word that is used for Boaz's taking of Ruth (4.13) – and puts him in her own bosom (*vekheqah*), becoming wet-nurse to him (4.16). With the words of the women – 'A son has been born (*yulladh*) to Naomi' – the appropriation is complete. Ruth has disappeared, leaving the barest trace. That appears with the child's name: Obed (*'ovedh*) is part of the same semantic field of *'bdh*, to labour, and also gives us *'evedh*, slave.

Like Clarissa in Eagleton's analysis of Richardson's texts, Ruth becomes a pure ideological means to an end: the resolution of an ideological anomaly. For Richardson this is the feminization of bourgeois relations, whereas for this narrative the disparate identity of Israel and its patriliny is ensured through the appropriation of Ruth's labour and body. The narrative closes with the lineage of Obed through Jesse to David.

Conclusion

In my exploration of Ruth's status as ideological anomaly, the three concerns I have taken up from Eagleton – ethnicity, class and gender – all draw together. As far as ethnicity is concerned, the epithet 'Moabitess' is crucial, for Ruth's foreign status is reiterated over and again. She is and remains a foreign body within Israel, so much so that, despite all her protestations of loyalty (1.16–17), she cannot be the mother of the son. Obed belongs to Boaz and Naomi; Ruth is merely the vessel by which the son in born. For what it is worth, this nervous concern over the dynamics of social boundaries appears relatively late, when the identity of 'Israel' was very much an obsession. How can an older woman, Naomi, beyond childbearing age, and a man without a son have an heir? Or rather, how can a threatened inheritance, that of Elimelech, be rescued? In other words, the question of ethnicity in this text concerns the establishment of the clearest boundaries between legitimate Israelites and those who are not.

As for gender, only a woman can fill the narrative role, for Ruth must both work in the field and give birth to a son, who becomes crucial for the unfolding patriliny. Yet, Ruth disappears when her tasks are done. Thus, after the short narrative of her giving birth to a son, the characteristic yet anomalous formula of men giving birth returns: 'Perez caused to bear (*holidh*) Hezron, Hezron caused to bear…' (4.18–19). The indirect object – the woman – disappears and men give birth to men. Ruth's effacement is complete. As for Naomi, she becomes an honorary male, operating in the world of men, exchanging field shares and inheritance, and living off the surplus produced by Ruth.

On the matter of class, it is clear that neither Naomi nor Boaz work in this story. They, the Israelites, do not labour but

appropriate the surplus – the grain from the fields and the son from Ruth's body – of one who does work far too hard. The terminology here is class-driven: the 'young men' who reap are clearly the labourers, at the opposite end to Boaz, the owner of the means of production. Even lower than the 'young men' are the 'young women' who follow the reapers and glean after them. So too is Ruth a 'young woman'. Crucially, this word appears both when she works in the field and when she is about to give birth. This means that the pernicious economic picture that emerges in the book of Ruth is that the Israelites – above all Naomi and Boaz – are those who do not work, who exploit and live off the surplus produced by others. Naomi becomes one of the Israelite men, owners of the means of production, whereas Ruth, Moabitess, woman and worker, disappears when her body has been used up.

In the spirit of Eagleton's arguments – in his analyses of both *Wuthering Heights* and Richardson's novels concerning the class transitions that these texts both mark and enable – I suggest the following in relation to the book of Ruth. It gives voice to both an ideological status quo, in terms of women, and to the emergence of an ideological position that identifies Israel's superior status, as 'chosen people', in terms of class. That which distinguishes Israel from other states is not merely ethnicity but also its status as a class of the owners of the means of production. This image is of course impossible economically and may be seen as a curious response to the very marginal economic and political status of the southern Levant in the context of ancient Southwest Asia.[18] Yet, the ideological effect of the book of Ruth is that such a class identification of Israel neatly removes women from the picture, especially in stories that concern women.

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[18] Igor M. Diakonoff, 'Main Features of the Economy in the Monarchies of Ancient Western Asia', *Troisième conférence internationale d'histoire economique: The Ancient Empires and the Economy* (Moses I. Finley (ed.); Paris: Mouton, 1969), pp. 13–32 (29); Niels Peter Lemche, *Historical Dictionary of Ancient Israel* (Lanham: Scarecrow, 2004), p. 8; Mario Liverani, *Israel's History and the History of Israel* (trans. Chiara Peri and Philip Davies; London: Equinox, 2005), pp. 6, 9–10; Ianir Milevski, *Early Bronze Age Goods Exchange in the Southern Levant: A Marxist Perspective* (London: Equinox, 2011), p. 27.

Summary

- Terry Eagleton shows how class and ethnicity are woven together through his analysis of *Wuthering Heights*.
- He also indicates how gender and class may conceal one another through a discussion of Samuel Richardson's novels.
- Class may be identified in the book of Ruth through careful analysis of the linguistic terms for the characters.
- Through ethnicity, Naomi becomes one of the ruling class, along with Boaz.
- Ruth disappears in the story, since as a field labourer, ethnic other and woman, her identity is appropriated by others.

5

Henri Lefebvre: The production of space in 1 Samuel

Henri Lefebvre, Marxist philosopher and social scientist, one-time member of the French Communist Party, parent of numerous offspring with numerous partners, director of the Institut de Sociologie Urbaine in Paris (Nanterre), intellectual inspiration for May 1968 in France (at the tender age of 67), author of no less than 66 books, remains one of the under-translated giants of the great tradition of French intellectual life from the 1930s to the 1980s. A single chapter is hardly the place to deal with the extraordinary range of his writings, so I focus on his influential work, *The Production of Space*.[1] The following outlines the theoretical touchstones of Lefebvre's approach, as well as his key distinction

[1] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (trans. David Nicholson-Smith; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991 [1974]). The book was the final product of an intense investigation into urbanization and the question of space between 1968 and 1974, the year the book first appeared in French. Since Lefebvre's work is both the source of subsequent developments, I focus on his work here. Harvey's work is, as I write, possibly more well-known in the English-speaking realms of academia, but while it serves a useful introductory function, it lacks the sophistication and depth of Lefebvre's approach. See Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); James Flanagan, 'Ancient Perceptions of Space/Perceptions of Ancient Space', *Semeia* 87 (2001), pp. 15–43; David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (London: Verso, 2007 [1982]);

between three types of space and their connections with different economic forms. I then bring Lefebvre's insights to bear on the text of 1 Samuel 1–2, exploring its many-layered permutations of space and its production.

The productions of space

Lefebvre's theoretical framework was indebted to dialectical Marxism, or what he preferred to call dialectical materialism (with debts to Lenin). His particular approach was to play with the opposition or contradiction in question. Keen to keep the dialectic open and running, he considered it from myriad perspectives and inevitably favoured the lesser term of the opposition in order to move through to a reformulation of the whole problem. Often, he introduced a third term to trouble the opposition: the old opposition of space and time may find energy appearing, or truth and beauty may be troubled by the arrival of rhythm, or, as in my focus here, economics and politics must also deal with the question of space. Or when he was dealing with the more conventional opposition between abstract theory and the concrete reality of practice, he sought to reconceive practice itself. Thus, his theoretical elaborations were based on innovative fieldwork, focusing on what was (at the time) usually ignored – everyday experiences, flows and patterns, emotions and bodies. In this respect, he was imbued with a deep sensitivity for human living, which was enhanced by his interests in the situationist and surrealist movements. Marxism is, for Lefebvre, concerned with the totality of human and natural life, and not merely economics and politics.

Three types of space

For my purposes, the key to Lefebvre's analysis of space is a threefold distinction:

David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From Right to the City to Urban Revolution* (London: Verso, 2012).

1. *Spatial practice* is the space we see around us, which we experience and negotiate. This is space perceived (*perçu*) at a common-sense level. In more detail, it involves production and reproduction, as well as the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation. Spatial practice ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion. In terms of social space, and of each member of a given society's relationship to that space, this cohesion implies a guaranteed level of *competence* and a specific level of *performance*.
2. *Representations of space* (*représentations de l'espace*) is the way we conceive the obvious space around us. Lefebvre calls it the conception of space (*l'espace conçu*). These representations of space concern the discourses and debates on space, in the realms of analysis, design and planning. They are tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes and to 'frontal' relations. Here we find maps, plans, surveys, geographical surveys and so on.
3. *Spaces of representation* (*espaces de la représentation*) are less obvious but the most important. For Lefebvre, this is lived space (*l'espace vécu*), where real people live. How are these spaces different from the previous two aspects of the production of space? They are covert rather than overt, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art. They provide partially concealed criticism of social orders and the categories of social thought, and may happen through bodies, aesthetics, gender and so on. Needless to say, spaces of representation embody complex symbolisms, with a constant process of coding, recoding and decoding. In other words, here are the seeds of resistance, which appears either as historical sediments or as glimpses of the new, utopian possibilities of a new spatialization of social life.[2]

[2] Henri Lefebvre, 'La production de l'espace,' *L'Homme et la société* 31–2 (1974), pp. 15–32; Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, pp. 33, 245; Rob Shields, *Lefebvre, Love and Struggle: Spatial Dialectics* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 160–70.

Before I say a little more concerning each of these categories, I would like to make a couple of general comments. Although it seems like a commonplace now, the idea that certain givens of human experience are social and economic constructions rather than immovable, eternal and natural objects, was an argument that still needed some work in the early 1970s. The constructionism that now reigns across the humanities and social sciences owes a large debt to the work of Marx and Marxists like Lefebvre, so that it has become possible to see how bodies, genders, sexualities, apart from the more common targets of culture, religion and the family, are constructed in certain ways in certain social formations. Yet, Lefebvre speaks not of the 'construction' but of the 'production' (*la production*) of space. More than a linguistic quibble is at issue here, for 'production' evokes the crucial Marxist category of mode of production. Since I have dealt with that topic in the introduction, I do not need to say more here, except for one point. For Lefebvre, human beings both produce and are produced. We are produced by the conditions in which we live, but we also produce those very same conditions. That is, natural, economic and social conditions make us who we are, but we are the ones who have produced the types of nature, economics and society in question. Thus, it is not a contrast between nature and nurture (to use a popular opposition), but the dialectical relation between the two: just as nature constructs the specific forms of nurture under which we live, so also does nurture reshape nature in its own way.

As far as spatial practice is concerned, Lefebvre refers primarily to social space, the space created by humans in their interaction with nature, each other and former modes of production. However, social space appears in relation to natural space, the space of a nature which is increasingly under threat. Since capitalism is now rampant, Lefebvre argues that social space under capitalism now has nature at its mercy: everyone wants to preserve nature, yet every act under capitalism seeks to undermine such a desire. This is the crucial point: the very desire to preserve nature indicates that it is now the loser, the one that requires the goodwill of human beings to persist. Ever the dialectician, Lefebvre goes a step further, arguing that natural space has already disappeared. Instead, the very 'nature' upon which we now look has been produced by human beings.[3]

[3] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, pp. 30–1.

Spatial practice involves not only production, but also reproduction. That is, a mode of production needs to perpetuate itself, a process carried out at all levels from the macro-economic (the patterns of global capital), through class (the reproduction of the labour power of the working class), to the personal (a point close to home for Lefebvre and his many offspring). Reproduction is also a way of reintroducing sex into the most fundamental of Marxist categories, thereby recovering a feature of Marxism that has been central since its beginnings. By sex he means not merely the processes of breeding, but also libido.

More important for my analysis of the text of 1 Samuel are the other two categories, the representations of space and the spaces of representation. These are opposed to one another as the frontal and the hidden, the overt and the covert relations of production. Let us see how this works. Not only does each mode of production produce specific types of social space, but it also has a particular form of relations of production. This entails the issue of class and class conflict, between the ruling class that owns the means of production and the exploited, labouring classes that do not own those means. The issue is how these relations of production operate spatially. In order to trace this, Lefebvre invokes all the complexity of his dialectical materialism. He identifies three types of interaction between reproduction and the social relations of production: biological reproduction, the reproduction of labour power and the reproduction of the social relations of production. Each of these three interacting layers is displayed symbolically, and that happens in a way that is simultaneously explicit and concealed (through being displaced). Such a symbolic system works with relations of production that are both out there and not, in the forefront and clandestine, explicit and repressed. The former, overt type appears in the forms of monuments, public art and buildings, especially those of state and business. Obviously, this is the domain of the ruling class, of the representations of space. Here we find the frontal, obvious node of the relations of production. By contrast, the spatial production of those exploited by the ruling class is more covert and clandestine. This is the shadowy realm of spaces of representation; it concerns what is hidden and closed over, and is therefore the focus of resistance to the ruling class's representations of space. In other words, the frontal class, the one of monuments and impressive buildings and the clear marks of power, stands over

against that class which is repressed, beaten down and exploited. Lefebvre's innovation is to widen this to the symbolic field of relation of production, of class relations.

Lefebvre's oft-repeated example is one he in fact loathed – the bourgeois family home, which dialectically includes both dimensions within it. The overt dimension of the house, facing the street, is its sitting room or formal lounge room, where considerable expense is outlaid: lounges and tables and exquisite chairs, with expensive curtains and pieces of art either on the walls or standing. The public realm of the bourgeois house is one of decor, money and repression. Perhaps the only other room allowed such visual presence is the formal dining room, usually leading off from the lounge room. But there is another realm of such boxes for living in that marks a whole series of repressions: the preparation of food takes place out of sight, as do toilet functions, both evacuating and washing. If these are relegated to the back of the house, the most hidden is sex itself, restricted to night-time in the parents' bedroom, with a locked door and when the children are asleep, or, if older, out of the house.

How can these distinctions be used for interpreting biblical texts like 1 Samuel? While each should be applicable, the first – spatial practice – requires detailed historical, archaeological and, above all, economic analysis. Although I have undertaken such a task in *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*,[4] I focus on that element only after I have explored the other two modes of space. These concern symbolic representation, where cultural products such as texts come to the fore. In my reading of 1 Samuel 1–2, therefore, I deal first with the representations of space and the spaces of representation.

Periodizing space

There is one final issue before I turn to the Hebrew Bible. A substantial portion of *The Production of Space* seeks to refashion the Marxist periodization of history in terms of space. Such periodizing is, of course, never a given; it is always a problematic, a topic for constant debate, rather than set in stone. Lefebvre deals with

[4] Roland Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*.

this problematic head-on: if the production of space is inescapably tied to modes of production, then one may expect different types of space for different modes of production. For me, the sheer imagination and ability to sustain thought in this way is one of the most impressive dimensions of Lefebvre's work. In the following table, I have outlined, in the first column, the various modes of production debated in Marxist theory. The second column connects the various productions of space identified by Lefebvre.[5]

Mode of Production	*Space*
Hunting and gathering, agriculture and husbandry (tribal society, primitive communism or the horde)	absolute space (nature)
Neolithic agriculture (the *gens* or hierarchical kinship societies)	absolute space
Asiatic mode of production ('oriental despotism' and divine kings)	sacred space
Ancient or classical mode of production (the *polis* or oligarchic slave-holding society)	historical space (political states, Greek city-states, Roman empire)
Feudalism	sacred space
Early capitalism (classical and monopoly forms)	abstract space (politico-economic space)
Late capitalism	contradictory space (global capital versus localized meaning)
Communism	differential space (future space revaluing difference and lived experience)

[5] I link Lefebvre's periodization of space with the discussion and tabulation by Shields, although I have fine–tuned some points where Shields misses the point somewhat. Shields, *Lefebvre, Love and Struggle: Spatial Dialectics*, pp. 170–2.

The immediate point to make is that this is far from a linear progression, with each mode of production succeeding the previous one. Instead, their relationship is dialectical, with each mode of production sequestered in the one that is dominant, albeit in subordinate and hidden forms (especially those in closest proximity). This reality is more obvious with the productions of space, for absolute and sacred space appear more than once, and Lefebvre's anticipated differential space may already have been seen – covertly – in those that dominate earlier.

For my purposes, the most significant forms are absolute space and sacred space, so let me say a little more concerning each. Absolute space is the space of nature. In this context, the social space of the tribe inscribes itself, specifically the semi-nomadic tribe of a hunter-gatherer society, with its seasonal paths, temporary camps and border zones. Whether hunting for game, engaged in limited agriculture or even in the first farming settlements, absolute space dominates. The production of space is here analogical, conceiving of the camp, settlement or village – human society – in terms of a mythic body, with the layout of such settlements narrativized in mythic and magical narrative. There is a distinct anthropomorphism in the representation of space, the settlement and its environment, with settlement and its outside understood in terms of the body and its beyond.

Sacred space is produced with the emergence of the city-state, which Lefebvre finds in ancient Southwest Asia, traditional Asian societies such as that of China, and also the early stages of the Greek world. Rome and its empire comprises a new stage, that of historical space. In other words, against the more conventional division that begins with Greece and the reliance of such a mode of production on slave labour – a system whereby the economic and social, let alone the cultural, possibilities of the Greek and Roman worlds are enabled by the labour of slaves – Lefebvre posits the emergence of the city-state and then of the Roman imperial system as the points of transition. This is a larger argument that I do not need to pursue in detail, but it is symptomatic of Lefebvre, for whom the city was a vital dimension of his lived experience, as also of his writing and research.

However, these city-states are not capitalism (for which he reserves his most sustained analysis and critique): in the new city-state the sacred and the political are inseparable. The location of

palace and temple in one location, side by side and often connected as one building, marks the possibility of the city-state. The sacred city – Babylon, Beijing, Egyptian cities of the Pharaohs, Jerusalem itself – supersedes the village and the semi-nomadic tribe to constitute the new, central sacred space. Despot, city and the gods are inseparable; the despot is so often a god, a descendent of a god or in a relationship much closer than any other citizen; the city is where the god-despot dwells.[6] In exacting tribute, such cities dominate the rural regions surrounding them, pushing back nature, the realm of absolute space, through the technologies of political, economic and sacred power. This form of the city mutates into the Greek *polis* and even dimensions of the Roman *urbs*, in which the sacred space of the city, as *imago mundi*, is set over against the barbarian outside, that realm beyond the power of the city-state.

To sum up: the categories of absolute and sacred space will appear below, in my close reading of 1 Samuel. I am especially interested in the dialectical interaction between them as the text explores the tensions between the temple and the rural origins of Elkanah, Hannah and Peninah. However, these spaces play a subordinate role in the key tension between the representations of space and the spaces of representation. Here overt and covert, domination and resistance, sanctuary and womb are my chief concerns. Only then is it possible to ask some questions concerning spatial practice.

The biblical spaces of 1 Samuel 1–2

> How much can we really learn, for instance, confined as we are to Western conceptual tools, about the Asiatic mode of production, its space, its towns, or the relationship it embodies between town and country?[7]

Since 1 Samuel 1–2 is a written text, it speaks, according to Lefebvre's schema, of the representations of space and spaces of

[6] It is worth noting how close Deleuze and Guattari come to Lefebvre at this point (see Chapter 3).

[7] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, pp. 31–2.

representation.[8] It can then speak only in a secondary manner about spatial practice; or rather, there is a spatial practice of the text that refers to the spatial practice of whatever social formation it comes from. As far as the representation of space is concerned – the 'frontal' discourse of space, the logic, ideology and conceptual depictions of space in relation to modes of production – we need to begin with the last verses of Judges, which may be read as an introduction to this text: 'And the people of Israel departed from there at that time, every one to his tribe and family, and they went out from there every one to his inheritance. In those days there was no king in Israel; every one did what was right in his own eyes' (Judg. 21.24–5; see also Judg. 18.1; 19.1; 1 Kgs 22.17; 2 Chron. 18.16). Following the suggestion of David Jobling, I read these verses not as a condemnation of the chaos just depicted, a conclusion to the story of the Benjaminites, but rather as the possibility of desirable state of affairs, without a king to rule over them and exact tribute. In this case, the verses set up the spatial possibilities of 1 Samuel 1–2.

Sanctuary: Representations of space

So there is a man from his own inheritance – Ramathaim-zophim of the hills of Ephraim – and from his own tribe and family – Elkanah the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, and Ephraimite (1 Sam. 1.1). The representation of space here is a dispersed pattern of living, each person living in a particular geographical and tribal place, what Lefebvre would designate as

[8] I should make it clear that whereas Lefebvre assumes the representational function of texts, from architecture through human bodies to written texts themselves, the kind of representation he works with is not one that is second nature to most biblical scholars, namely, the specific history of a people or a period, the acts of states, groups of people or individuals from day to day and year to year. So, while the referential function of 1 Samuel 1–2 can tell us little about any figures such as Samuel or Eli, the events surrounding them or even the motives of storytellers and scribes who may have told or penned such a story at an indeterminate later period, it can tell us something about the production of space, of broader economic and cultural patterns in a much larger time frame that beggars any effort at more specific dating.

a *habitus*.[9] The issue is one of the relations of production, specifically the distribution of human beings and their relations to each other in the production of what is required for human existence. The naming of the two women of Elkanah, Hannah and Peninah, is part of the same logic, as is the crucial statement, 'And Peninah had children, but Hannah had no children' (1 Sam. 1.2). The problem as it unfolds in this story is the barrenness of Hannah, which, as the story makes clear, is distinctly *her* problem, since Peninah had sex with the same man as she. This touches on the question of the reproduction of the means of production, as well the spaces of representation, to which I will turn in a moment. But what we have here is an economic unit, given that families of whatever shape are at basis economic units in particular modes of production. David Jobling, following Norman Gottwald, has argued that under the monarchy we find what may be termed a 'tributary' mode of production, a revised form of Marx's famous Asiatic mode of production. Prior to this, under the ideal of judgeship that appears in Judges and 1 Samuel, he prefers the notion of a 'household' or 'familial' mode of production – that is somewhat more egalitarian in terms of sexual difference than what follows under monarchy – to Gottwald's 'communitarian' mode of production. He also makes explicit use of Karl Wittfogel's *Oriental Despotism*[10] to argue that the 'transition from a more egalitarian to a tributary mode is typically accompanied by shifts from female-based to male-based patterns of kinship and social organization, from a low-level agriculture dominated by women to an intensive agriculture organized by men, and from the extended family to the nuclear family'.[11] Apart from the reactionary nature of Wittfogel's argument (it is directed against the Soviet Union) and the technologism (changes in mode of production have to do with uses of water and irrigation), what lies behind it is the fantasy of Bachofen and Lewis Henry Morgan, with their arguments for a prior matriarchy before patriarchy took over. Jobling's is a gentler

[9] Lefebvre predates the well-known use made by Pierre Bourdieu of the concept of habitus. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (trans. Richard Nice; London: Routledge, 1984 [1979]).

[10] Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1963).

[11] David Jobling, *1 Samuel* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), p. 146.

version, but it still assumes such a background.[12] As will be seen in what follows, such a position is difficult to sustain.

But let me stay with the representations of space: the immediate narrative event is the annual journey to worship and sacrifice at the sanctuary at Shiloh. This journey, the path taken from a small space in the hills of Ephraim to Shiloh, is one of those flows of which Lefebvre speaks time and again, open to what he also calls 'rhythm-analysis'.[13] The annual journey frames the story, determining its rhythm: at the end of this particular trip, 'they rose early in the morning and worshipped before Yahweh; then they went back to their house at Ramah' (1 Sam. 1.19). But then, after conception and birth, the family, minus Hannah and Samuel, travel to Shiloh again (1 Sam. 1.21). Eventually Hannah goes up after weaning the child in order to dedicate him to the shrine (1 Sam. 1.24); they return home (1 Sam. 2.11); and then return year by year with a robe for Samuel which Hannah makes for him and gives to him at the time of yearly sacrifice (1 Sam. 2.19) The annual journey to the major shrine indicates the importance of the shrine itself, with its priestly family, Eli, Hophni and Phinehas. In contrast to Ramah, the shrine, the place of worship no matter how modest or grand, is a key representation of space, a frontal dimension which orders the lives of the smaller economic units of the extended families and tribes. The spatial pattern is like a wheel with unequal spokes leading in all directions from the centre, or perhaps like an asterisk with lines leading out and coming into the point at the middle, the sanctuary. What we have here, then, is the production of sacred space and its organization of the social and economic patterns of human life.

The spatial patterns of the sanctuary itself, while not laid out explicitly as in so many places (the tabernacle of Moses, Solomon's temple, Ezekiel's temple plans and so on), appear as well. Eli, semi-retired (Hophni and Phinehas are the priests – 1 Sam. 1.3), sits 'on the seat beside the door post of the temple of Yahweh' (1 Sam. 1.9), able to observe Hannah praying. The line of sight is important here

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[12] See further Roland Boer, 'Women First? On the Legacy of Primitive Communism', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 30, 1 (2005), pp. 3–28.

[13] Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (trans. Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore; London: Continuum, 2004).

as well, for Eli commands the sanctuary with his sight, although his insight itself is lacking with regard to Hannah.

Womb: Spaces of representation

What of the spaces of representation – the clandestine or underground side of social life, the sediments of lived space, of gender relations and family patterns, and the possibilities of something new? The annual journey to Shiloh moves from Ramah and back again. Ramah emerges as one of these of spaces of representation, from which Hannah, Peninah, Elkanah and then Samuel emerge. Elsewhere in 1 Samuel (7.17; 8.4; 15.34; 16.13; 19.18–23; 20.1; 25.1; 28.3), it is the exclusive domain of Samuel.[14] The journey itself is occasion for rivalry between Hannah and Peninah, for the latter taunts Hannah over her barrenness. Peninah provokes and irritates, so Hannah responds with weeping and refusal to eat. An ineffectual Elkanah, who 'loves' Hannah, can only ask questions restricted to the space of representation – weeping, eating, her heart and her barren womb (1 Sam. 1.8).

These family dynamics have led Carol Meyers to argue for the importance of the public–private divide in this and other stories. The curious turn of Meyers's argument is to search for the active presence of women in the biblical narratives, a presence screened by the effects of theological and male dominance in biblical studies, in terms of the domestic or private sphere. Thus, Hannah's sacrifice in 1 Samuel 1.24 becomes a private ritual, an aspect of 'family religion' that is more apparent in the Masoretic Text.[15] The catch here is not only the problematic public–private distinction that it assumes, but also that any attribution of female agency in ritual remains in the private sphere – hardly a gain in an assumed world of public male dominance. It seems to me that Lefebvre's distinction between spaces of representation and representations of space are

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[14] Jan Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analysis. Volume 4: Vow and Desire (I Sam. 1–12)* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1993), p. 7.

[15] Carol Meyers, 'Hannah and her Sacrifice: Reclaiming Female Agency', *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings* (Athalya Brenner (ed.), *The Feminist Companion to the Bible*; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), pp. 93–104 (101).

much more subtle and workable, for the whole public–private distinction is tied too closely to the specific dynamics of capitalism.

Thus, apart from the family dynamics, the bodies of the women function as the major spaces of representation, specifically their wombs (*rekhem*), the matrix of the story (for which Ramah, *ramah*, as a veiled pun becomes a cipher). It is as though the wombs are set over against the sanctuary, the other pole around which this story oscillates. Both hidden and foregrounded, Peninah's fertile womb contrasts with Hannah's barren womb. It is the cause of their conflict, a marker of Hannah's economic superfluity (Elkanah gives her but one portion), and the focus of her prayer in the sanctuary. Her vow – to dedicate the son born as a Nazirite to Yahweh at the shrine – focuses again on her womb, for she urges Yahweh to open her womb in reverse to the divine closure (1 Sam. 1.6). Then it is time, after the blessing pronounced by Eli, for Elkanah's seed to find its way into her womb, where a son is conceived and born (1 Sam. 1.19–20). Hannah's body is now the location of sex and impregnation, and it remains fecund, particularly after the dedication of Samuel and the annual blessing from Eli (2 Sam. 2.20–1). I will return in a moment to the pattern whereby various males – Eli, Elkanah and Yahweh – all ensure Hannah's fertility.

Hannah's body works in one other way in this text, apart from empty womb, source of anguish, blessing, divine visitation and sex. I refer here to Eli's singular lack of perception: he observes her mouth and her lips moving. This is the realm of representations of space, for Eli, the priest in the sanctuary of Yahweh, is in that realm. It is also, for Lefebvre, the zone of perception, space that is perceived. Spatial practice (perceived space) breaks in here, for Eli perceives her lips and her mouth, but that is all, given his spatial role in the story, that he can perceive. She, however, speaks in her heart, but her voice is not heard. The very use of heart in this sense, very different from the observed heart of medicine, or (to avoid too much anachronism) an open dead body, is in the realm of the symbolic and the mythic. The heart as lived is very different from the heart as thought and perceived. This heart is the location of Hannah's desire, her anxiety and vexation (1 Sam. 1.16), but also processes of mystification. The contrast between Eli and Hannah could not be sharper in terms of space: the one comes from the representation of space, the other from the space of representation.

Eli sees her mouth and lips, but does not hear her voice. Hannah's heart acts as a metaphor for her womb, but her womb cannot be mentioned directly. In a perceptive *tour de force*, Eli concludes she is drunk. In response to Eli's rebuke, she admits not to pouring drink into her body, but pouring out her *nephesh* to God (1 Sam. 1.15). Yet, even though her womb draws the prayer from her, she reveals to Eli none of the content of her prayer. Other parts of her bodily self, internal and external, have been revealed, but not her womb and its vexations. The spaces of representation in this case are not as myopic as Eli, for in the realm of the shrine, the external and frontal representation of space, it is not possible for her womb to be mentioned, seen or referred to. It is a realm both crucial to yet suppressed by the overt structure of space in this text. Hannah's womb remains unspoken and unperceived within the sanctuary, since sanctuary and womb are at odds with each other in spatial terms. If we pick up Lefebvre again, we find that in the production of sacred space, the realm of nature and of women's bodies is suppressed and removed from the domain of shrine, temple and also city. But this space, what he calls absolute space, does not disappear; rather, it retreats into the interior, into the enclosed spaces of caves, nooks and crannies, alleyways and of course bodies. The womb becomes a prime site for such an investment of alternative space, outside the bodies of males, of sanctuaries and cities, it yet remains crucial to the pattern of sacred commerce: hence the roles of Eli, Elkanah and God in relation to her womb. So here, it seems, we find the intersection of absolute space and sacred space, an overlap that Lefebvre himself was keen on locating.

To sum up my reading thus far: Eli and the sanctuary provide the lineaments of obvious, frontal representations of space. These are the overt spaces, laid out and visible for all to provide orientation. Yet Eli, the one who inhabits this perceived space, is unable to perceive what goes on with Hannah. She thereby occupies the spaces of representation, marked out above all by her womb – a covert space that marks the lived space of common, everyday rural life. Is this, then, a point of resistance, as Lefebvre would like to think? Is it a place where alternative, even utopian possibilities emerge? If we follow the work of Butler or Blum and Nast, then bodies, especially female bodies, spatially exceed our representations and images, twisting away from patriarchal signs

and controls.[16] It would appear, on one reading at least, that the militant anthem of 1 Samuel 2.1–10 fits the bill. It celebrates the strengthening, by God, of the weak and lowly, the bringing down of mighty kings, powerful, proud and arrogant men. The hungry, feeble and barren find food, strength and pregnancy.[17] Others who seek some form of resistance in the narrative make the most of Hannah's agency: Meyers speaks of the 'validity and autonomy' of her actions[18]; Amit of Hannah's 'delicacy', 'virtue' and 'sensitivity' in protest[19]; Klein of her move from being the victim of mimetic desire to a social redeemer who refuses such a logic.[20] Jobling argues for a deliberate strategy of recuperating Hannah's initiative for an ecclesial context in which such women are few and far between.[21] For Jobling, however, Hannah's initiative seeks to forestall the arrival of kingship and restore the traditional and slightly more egalitarian order of judgeship.

The catch is that despite Hannah's initiative, she is finally co-opted back into the larger (mythic) logic of the narrative.[22] More dialectically, it is not so much that she is co-opted, reluctantly, back into the narrative: rather, it is through her very agency that she becomes a key to the deeper logic of the system itself. And a major signal of that logic is the production of space, for here we find the dominant mode asserting itself time and again. In other words, she is co-opted, via divine intervention and the production of a son who will enter the sacred representation of space.

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[16] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 1983); Virginia Blum and Heidi Nast, 'Where's the Difference? The Heterosexualization of Alterity in Henri Lefebvre and Jacques Lacan', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 14, 4 (1996), pp. 559–80.

[17] Jobling, *1 Samuel*, pp. 166–8.

[18] Meyers, 'Hannah and her Sacrifice: Reclaiming Female Agency', pp. 102.

[19] Yairah Amit, '"Am I Not More Devoted to You Than Ten Sons?" (1 Sam. 1.8): Male and Female Interpretations', *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings* (Athalya Brenner (ed.), *The Feminist Companion to the Bible*; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), pp. 68–76 (75).

[20] Lillian R. Klein, 'Hannah: Marginalized Victim and Social Redeemer', *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings* (Athalya Brenner (ed.), *The Feminist Companion to the Bible*; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), pp. 77–92.

[21] Jobling, *1 Samuel*, pp. 131–42.

[22] Jobling, *1 Samuel*, p. 165; Klein, 'Hannah: Marginalized Victim and Social Redeemer', p. 92.

Power dynamics: Spatial practice

What of Lefebvre's remaining category? Spatial practice appears at certain points that reflect an economy of the sacred, in which issues of production and reproduction can be perceived only in terms of the sacred. So it is that Peninah taunts Hannah on the annual journey to Shiloh, specifically after the allocation of portions to each member of the extended family, for Hannah would be given only one portion (1 Sam. 1.4, see also v. 7). Why not at other times in this story? At this moment the role of the divine in reproduction is highlighted: on the journey, or rather at Shiloh, after the sacrifice, sacred economics come to the fore.

Let me pick up Lefebvre's interest in the reproduction of a social formation, a reproduction that has as much to do with ideological factors as it is with giving birth. In a situation of chronic labour shortage, with a small population in vast landscapes, high infant mortality and a life expectancy of not much more than 30 years of age, the birth of any child was usually seen as both valuable and highly fraught with risks. So it is with this story, although with a few twists. To begin with, the pattern of reproduction seems to follow another rhythm from that of sex itself. In order for Hannah to conceive, she first goes to Shiloh, prays at the shrine, receives a blessing from Eli, is remembered (1 Sam. 1.19) or visited (2 Sam. 2.21) by God and then has sex with Elkanah. It seems as though she needs three men for the whole process to work (1 Sam. 1.20; 2 Sam. 2.21). As far as the rhythm of the story is concerned, it is only after the annual sacrifice and vow that the correct combination comes together for conception. This odd pattern is reinforced by the obverse, when she does not go (1 Sam. 1.22), promising to do so when she has weaned the child. Then, when Hannah brings Samuel to dedicate him at the shrine, no pregnancy ensues, for there is no blessing, visitation or sex in the story at that moment either.

It seems that the story has the making of a divine economy in which the system requires the activity of God to keep it running. But there is another feature that at first seems to undermine all this. Is the dedication of Samuel as a Nazirite, to live and work at the temple, not an undermining of the need for labour power in a situation of labour shortage? Would it not be more suitable if he were to grow up in the clan and take his share of the workload? Or

at least he might be put to labour in the temple estate? However, Hannah has the system at heart, for in dedicating the child to Yahweh at the shrine she ensures that the sacred economy will continue. Not only does she fulfil her vow (1 Sam. 1.11) – necessary to avoid a divine curse – but she ensures that the role of the shrine and its priesthood in the spatial practice is maintained. This is the reason why the sons of Eli, as well as Eli himself, must appear worthless and corrupt in the story (2 Sam. 2.12–17, 22–36). Their sin is so great for it is a sin against God rather than other people (2 Sam. 2.25). Samuel, therefore, is their designated replacement, and Hannah thereby performs a crucial function for the maintenance of this particular production of space and its mode of production. Her boy, the product of her womb, must go to the shrine in order to underwrite its continuance at the hub of the spokes. Hannah is crucial to the story, as Meyers among others argues on the basis of the frequency of her name, her role in naming Samuel and her use of dialogue, but this is only because she is central to the dominant ideology and spatial practice of the narrative.[23]

Do even the spaces of representation fall victim to the spatial practice of a particular mode of production? Does Hannah's womb also, despite the utopian glimpse it provides, reinforce the system as a whole? It would seem so, except for one detail: it all takes place at Shiloh, not Jerusalem. Here I make a dialectical move, characteristic of Lefebvre, taking the discussion to another level and seeing the problem in a whole new way. What difference does Shiloh make? A whole lot, it seems to me.

Within the larger narrative context, Shiloh is a minor outpost, for the spatial centre of that expanded narrative is surely Solomon's temple (see 1 Kgs 6.1). This is supposedly the only place for legitimate worship of Yahweh. The other places, especially the high places, but also the other shrines and minor places for worship are therefore not to be tolerated. This applies even to those with some apparent pedigree, such as Bethel, Dan and of course Shiloh. So, a continual pattern becomes apparent in the wider narrative, in which worship must be carried out in Jerusalem, at the temple, and nowhere else, and yet alternative worship continues. The various

[23] Meyers, 'Hannah and her Sacrifice: Reclaiming Female Agency', pp. 96–100.

shrines and high places become contested zones, the subject of polemic and theological condemnation.[24]

Spatially, such a conflict is crucial on a number of levels. For instance, the split between Rehoboam and Jeroboam is read in terms of the legitimacy or otherwise of the sanctuaries to which people travel for sacrifice and worship. Jeroboam, in order to stop the people going to Jerusalem, sets up worship in Bethel and Dan so that the people may go there, so that the hubs are now located within the territory of Israel and not Judah (1 Kgs 12.25–33). This becomes a leitmotif for the rest of Kings, any condemnation now connected with the proverbial sins of Jeroboam. The contest closes with Josiah's destruction of the sanctuary at Bethel (2 Kgs 23.15–20). Indeed, Josiah's reform, with its long list of items destroyed, abolished, annihilated and ground into dust, embodies such a spatial contest in intricate detail, for the danger exhibited there is that if such a pattern of religious observance were allowed to go unchecked, it would infect the temple in Jerusalem as well.

So, in the broader context there is a spatial dynamic at work that lifts the consideration of Shiloh to a new dialectical level. If Shiloh falls into the category of one of these shrines, a hub of sacred space outside Jerusalem, then it is, as a whole, part of the spaces of representation. If sacred space seeks to control worship and economics in the central city and temple – for Lefebvre sacred space depends not so much on the shrine alone as on the sacred city – then Shiloh is in another place, namely, that of suppressed spaces, of the elements of an older spatial organization that has now succumbed to the new order. Along with the various high places, grottoes, trees and so on, it is now a space of representation, on par with village-communes and bodies themselves. What this means is that, whereas Hannah's womb and the sanctuary at Shiloh are spatially opposed to one another in the text of 1 Samuel 1–2, in the larger context her womb and the sanctuary fold into one space. They are both part of the spaces of representation. The spatial logic of this is that the very possibility of a story about her womb can

[24] This is where I disagree with Fokkelman's suggestion that Gibeah, Shiloh, Bethel and Bethlehem are all part of the same central zone around Jerusalem. Rather, they form the outposts of Jerusalem itself. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analysis. Volume 4: Vow and Desire (I Sam. 1–12)*, pp. 1–2.

take place only in a narratively marginal, suppressed space such as that of Shiloh. If it was in the Jerusalem of Solomon's temple, then it would have faced a narrative fate comparable to the baby fought over by the two sex workers in 1 Kings 3.16–28.

Further, the sheer absence of descriptions, plans and designs of the shrine at Shiloh marks it off as less a representation of space than a space of representation. All one is able to glean from the text is the centrality of Shiloh for the annual clan journey for worship. By contrast, the issue of plans, building programmes, sources of finance, interior design and so on is inseparable from the consideration of the temple in Jerusalem. Thus, 1 Kings 5.15 (ET 5.1)–7.38 is concerned with various facets of the building of the temple, comprising roughly a third of the total textual space given over to Solomon's reign (1 Kgs 3–11), let alone the dedication in the long Chapter 8. An enhanced version appears in 2 Chronicles 1–7, further temple plans appear in Ezekiel 40–8, and a good section of Ezra and Nehemiah is given over to the story of the rebuilding of the temple and then the city of Jerusalem itself. Various prophets (Haggai, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) agonize over the temple, Psalms sing its praises and hopes for the future rest there (the Maccabees). Finally, the only other stretch of text with as much detail about the construction of a sanctuary is of course that of the tabernacle. The detailed instructions of Yahweh, down to the fineries of interior design, curtain material and clothes for the priests, are passed on to Moses over 40 days and nights on Mt Sinai itself (Exod. 25–30), and then replicated in the description of its construction (Exod. 35–40). This is no less a representation of space than the temple in Jerusalem, and the two are linked through the wayward track of the ark of the covenant, which makes its way finally into the temple in Jerusalem.

Conclusion: Imperial space

The fleeting description of Shiloh pales by comparison to the inordinate attention given to temple and tabernacle. Let me return, however, to the tension I noted earlier between the central sacred space of Jerusalem and its temple. In the same way that worshippers and their acts of worship flow to the temple, so also

their tribute and produce from the palatine estates flow into the city and the ruling class that needs such items in order to live in the way to which they had become accustomed. Should we read the narrative presence of alternative, submerged and repressed spaces as sites of resistance, as places where older types of space remain and also from where new possibilities might arise, especially if they are connected with patterns of bodies that we find there as well? On one level it seems as though this is indeed possible, but I want to make another point: it is not so much that we should side with one or the other as a better space, but that the contradiction between the two is part of the very production of space for such a socio-economic system. That is, the centripetal site for sacred observance, with its temple and palace, the site for political and economic power that is simultaneously religious, cannot exist without the centrifugal spaces of alternative sites for worship, and so also political and economic activity. Jerusalem cannot exist without Shiloh, and vice versa, for this is the dialectical logic of such a production of space. It is therefore mistaken to argue for either the correctness of the henotheistic-monotheistic ideology of certain dimensions of the text or for the viability of widespread polytheism. Both exist within this particular mode of production as necessary counterparts to each other.

Thus far I have read 1 Samuel 1–2 at two levels – the immediate one of the story centred on Shiloh and then a larger one of the relation between Shiloh and comparable places with Jerusalem. Yet another and wider level reinforces my argument (but which cannot be argued at length here). If we look at the larger context we find that for most of its existence Jerusalem found itself in tension with stronger imperial centres, whether of the Egyptians, Assyrians, Neo-Babylonians, Persians, Greeks or Romans. On this level, Jerusalem becomes a minor point on the rim on a vaster wheel, perpetually oscillating between subservience to larger imperial centres and limited independence. On this level as well the fundamental contradiction of the sacred economy cannot be avoided, namely the centrifugal force of the periphery and the centripetal force of the centre. Such a pattern perpetually replicates itself on a range of scales.

Summary

- Henri Lefebvre's breakthrough studies of space identify three ways in which space may be produced: spatial practice (experienced and perceived); representations of space (power); spaces of representation (resistance).
- He also attempts to locate different productions of space in terms of the Marxist category of mode of production.
- In 1 Samuel 1–2, the sanctuary at Shiloh initially appears as a representation of space.
- Hannah's womb appears as a space of representation, and therefore resistance.
- These relations are reconfigured when we consider two further layers, the central sanctuary at Jerusalem, and then the imperial centres outside Israel.

6

Georg Lukács: The contradictory world of Kings

Georg Lukács is the only Marxist in this book who lived and worked for the bulk of his life (1885–1971) in places where the communist revolution had some permanence. As with many of the influential thinkers of the era, Lukács came from an upwardly mobile middle-class Jewish family that had assimilated into the dominant culture of central Europe, specifically Magyar Hungary. The contradiction of such a situation is that while it provided the socio-economic conditions that gave the opportunity for an extraordinary education, it was precisely these socio-economic conditions against which the offspring revolted. So it was that Lukács found his family's status intolerable from a very early age. Prolific from adolescence, he continued to write through some of the most tumultuous times in Europe: the First World War, the revolutionary unrest throughout Europe in its aftermath, the Second World War, the Hungarian Revolution, exile from Hungary in Germany and then in Russia under Stalin.

On this occasion, Lukács's literary work interests me most, especially his contribution to genre theory and the way it is able to highlights issues with the books of Kings.[1] His main argument

[1] Unfortunately, my focus on genre leaves out a significant and delectable range of items in Lukács's thought: the interplay between analysis and evaluation, text and social situation, the commitment to historicism, the insistence on key historical moments for marking transitions, the focus on the traces of a socio-economic period

appears in two works, *Theory of the Novel* and *The Historical Novel*.[2] Here he offers a highly dialectical argument: the form of the novel is an abstract effort at totality in the context of a disintegrated world, one that has been abandoned by God. Further, the novel is possible only in such a context and shows the tensions of such a situation in the form of the work. That is, genre is not merely a conflation of genres, but the effort to resolve certain historical, social and economic tensions that enable it. Similarly with the historical novel: this genre arose at a specific historical moment, before the European revolutions of 1848, when this genre provided the means of a distinct connection with the past (historical consciousness) as a way of understanding the present. It follows, then, that the historical novel lost its way when the bourgeoisie began to forget its origins and its relationship to the past became arbitrary.

After I have unpacked the previous paragraph, I offer a reading of the tension between prophetic and royal narratives in 1–2 Kings. In deploying Lukács's dialectical theory of genre, I trace the tensions in these narratives between the prophetic material that dominates in 1 Kings 17–2 Kings 9.10 and the narratives about kings that dominate the remaining material. Generically, the books of Kings sit uneasily between the category of 'historical books' and 'prophetic books'. In my analysis, I am on the lookout for what Lukács calls the 'historico–philosophical' feature or moment, the determinate ideological element that is peculiar to this generic tension.

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emerging in the form of the literature it produced, as well as the function of an all-pervasive reification and class-consciousness in literature and philosophy under capitalism. The range of studies on Lukács is immense, but the outstanding work remains that of Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 160–205; Fredric Jameson, 'Introduction' to Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), pp. 1–8; Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009), pp. 201–2.

[2] Georg Lukács, *Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (trans. Anna Bostock; Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1971 [1920]); Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (trans. Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983 [1937]).

A world abandoned by God

In *Theory of the Novel*, Lukács argues that the primary philosophical and historical tension of the novel genre is generated by 'a world that has been abandoned by God'.[3] Of all the other losses this genre laments – youth, an 'inner voice', home – the loss of faith or abandonment by God is the one that binds the others together. Is it apostasy or God's abandonment? Lukács speaks of both. Like a youth that grows into an adult, the beliefs of a young person, in which the gods are heroes, are put aside with the serious yet melancholy business of adulthood. But then, God too has taken leave of the world, so that there is no longer a voice 'that will clearly tell us our way and determine our goal'.[4] All of this assumes a world that was once inhabited by God. Not one for avoiding the grand sweep of history, Lukács sets the context for his argument by contrasting the integrated world of the Greeks and that of Christianity. While the Greeks are fundamentally alien to us (here is a criticism of the notion that ancient Greece is the foundation of 'Western' culture), the last integrated world was that of Christianity: 'the world became round once more, a totality capable of being taken in at a glance; the chasm lost the threat inherent in its actual depth; its whole darkness, without forfeiting any of its sombrely gleaming power, became pure surface and could thus be fitted easily into a closed unity of colours; the cry for redemption became a dissonance in the perfect rhythmic system of the world and thereby rendered possible a new equilibrium no less perfect than that of the Greeks.'[5] Yet, this was the last period of unity; once it was gone, only a disintegrated world would be possible. It is from here that he describes the context of the novel as a world forsaken by God.

Other features of the novel also play a role, such as interiority, discreteness, adventure and the demonic (in which the hero overreaches himself, without reason, as a way of compensating for

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[3] Lukács, *Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, p. 88.

[4] Lukács, *Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, p. 86.

[5] Lukács, *Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, pp. 37–8.

God's absence).[6] However, the other major feature of the novel is irony, which is itself a result of abandonment by God. Lukács's argument is quite complex, and although I cannot explore that argument in all its intricacy, some patient attention is needed. Irony is the mark of the novelist's freedom 'in his relationship to God'.[7] What does this mean? Only when God departs does it become possible to subsume God into the structure of the novel. Thus, the hero's actions and ethics assume features of God's existence and modes of redemption, and he finds freedom in a world 'whose ruler he has become because of his fall'.[8] This complete embrace of God by the structures of the novel can be approached best through irony, for 'irony, with intuitive double vision, can see where God is to be found in a world abandoned by God'.[9] A series of contradictory possibilities flow from this situation: the glimpse of home and the realization of its subjective and psychological conditioning; itself demonic, irony perceives the demon within; it seeks a world within only never to find it; and irony expresses both God's disdain for weak human rebellion and the suffering of God's inability to redeem the world. In the end, irony is 'not only the sole possible a priori condition for a true, totality-creating objectivity but also why it makes that totality – the novel – the representative art-form of our age: because the structural categories of the novel constitutively coincide with the world as it is today'.[10]

All of the efforts by the novel to overcome these tensions appear not only in its relation to the world, but also in terms of its inner

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[6] Lukács, *Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, p. 90. In order to highlight the nature of the new genre, Lukács compares the novel with two earlier forms, tragedy and epic. Thus, the passage from tragedy to the novel is a passage from destiny to adventure, from exteriority (soul and world are one) to interiority (soul and world are antagonistic). By contrast, the epic has no real adventure, for the hero knows he will pass through the tests put in his way.

[7] Lukács, *Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, p. 92.

[8] Lukács, *Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, p. 91.

[9] Lukács, *Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, p. 92.

[10] Lukács, *Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, p. 93.

form. In this respect, the core feature of the novel is to attempt a sense of unity in the context of a disintegrated world. The problem is that such a totality can only be abstract, for it is embodied in the hero. That is, the focus of the effort to find abstract unity is on the biographical individual.[11] The continuity of this key character is the effort to provide that sense of totality, that feeling that things can be held together. The catch is that such a unity is doomed to fail. In the very effort to find some abstract unity through the hero, the novel reveals the very conditions of a disintegrated world that it seeks to overcome.

Social conflict and the historical novel

Although *Theory of the Novel* is a pre-Marxist work, Lukács would carry through into his Marxist writings a concern with form, particularly that of genre, and the historical and philosophical tensions that gave rise to the particular form in question. So it is with *The Historical Novel*,[12] in which he refined his approach in light of Marxist insights into the nature of social and economic dynamics. Lukács would, of course, develop his own insights into the way literature relates to such dynamics.

The form of the historical novel marks, for Lukács, a new consciousness of history, a new perception of the relations between human beings and historical time. He writes: 'what I had in mind was a theoretical examination of the interaction between the historical spirit and the great genres of literature which portray the

[11] 'Thus the elements of the novel are, in the Hegelian sense, entirely abstract; abstract, the nostalgia of the characters for utopian perfection, a nostalgia that feels itself and its desires to be the only true reality; abstract, the experience of social structures based only upon their factual presence and their sheer ability to continue; abstract, finally, the form-giving intention which, instead of surmounting the distance between these two abstract groups of elements, allows it to subsist, which does not even attempt to surmount it but renders it sensuous as the lived experience of the novel's characters, uses it as a means of connecting the two groups and so turns in into an instrument of composition.' Lukács, *Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, pp. 70–1.

[12] Lukács, *The Historical Novel*.

totality of history'[13]; or, as Wesseling puts it, the historical novel 'strategically combined novelistic means with historical materials in order to do something for the disclosure of the past which the historian could not do'.[14] Lukács's great model was Walter Scott's first *Waverley* novel,[15] which is distinguished by the unique combination of: 1) a colourful and artistically faithful description of the historical period in question, which enables the reader to be put in touch with the 'inner life of an age'[16]; 2) the 'mediocre' hero, who becomes involved unwittingly in events beyond his or her comprehension, who is able to pass between great events and everyday life, and with whom readers can more readily identify. Both elements together gave voice not only to a new sense of historical consciousness, but also to a unique genre that derived the 'individuality of the characters from the peculiarity of their age'.[17]

However, I wish to emphasize a core feature of the historical novel, namely, its ability to depict social collisions and raise issues about periods of revolutionary upheaval. The form and content of the historical novel respond to and represent the profound tensions of the revolutions of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, revolutions which were marks of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. This point is pertinent for my interpretation of the books of Kings, since the production of a new genre, if not a generic conflict, functions as a response to social conflict. Lukács identifies four dialectical features of this response:

1) Everyday events and interactions register the larger historical and political events far more effectively than portrayals of the monumental clashes of history; 2) conservative, ruling-class politics may enable a writer to perceive and represent, however unwittingly, the vast transformations at all levels of society in the slow change from one mode of production to another; 3) historical fidelity does not rely on the correct reporting of individual facts,

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[13] Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 13.
[14] Elisabeth Wesseling, *Writing History as a Prophet: Postmodernist Innovations of the Historical Novel* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1991), p. 32.
[15] Walter Scott, *Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986 [1814]).
[16] Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 50.
[17] Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 19.

but on the artistic representation of the great collisions and crises of history; and 4) the non-simultaneity of the simultaneous (*die Ungleichzeitigkeit des Gleichzeitigen*), which involves the bringing together incompatible social and economic formations in a 'dramatic concentration and intensification of events'.[18]

For my reading of Kings, the dialectical features of Lukács's understanding of Scott's treatment of history are crucial. In the text of Kings it is virtually impossible to make any statements about the historical background with any certainty. However, the whole question of social collisions indicates that any adequate approach to history must trace the development, changes and shifts in modes of production. This is a far more workable notion of history than that which still prevails in biblical studies – concern with the particular items of history, such as the dates of documents or rulers, the establishment of timelines and so on.

Despite the distinction Lukács himself liked to make between the pre-Marxist *Theory of the Novel* and his Marxist *The Historical Novel*, the continuities are significant. Their basic argument is that genre functions as a specific ideological response to a historical situation in all sorts of contradictory and complex ways. What, then, can I draw from Lukács in my reading of Kings? The most obvious point is a dialectical concern with genre, in terms of the complex ways in which genre functions in relation to other genres and to its historical context. However, I am not able to apply Lukács's method directly, for the historical context remains opaque at the more detailed level at which he works. What I do, initially here and then more fully in the conclusion to this book, is utilize his emphasis on the larger question of mode of production, for my discussion of Kings may be regarded as one item in tracing out the ideological features of the mode of production in question. The whole notion of mode of production involves a complex and overlapping periodization of political economic eras, but the distinct value of such a concern in literary and cultural studies is that it avoids the tendency to treat questions of genre, along with other literary questions, purely in terms of themselves and their own literary history in isolation from the political and economic context without which they cannot be understood.

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[18] Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 41.

I therefore need to give detailed attention to the features that are characteristic of the genre of Kings. The problem with the study of genre in the Bible is that so often the pool of examples is painfully small, so that it becomes difficult to speak of genre. In the case of Kings, there are a couple of other texts that fall into a similar genre, namely Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Samuel and possibly Joshua and Judges. For the sake of my discussion, I take these as sufficient to form a small collection that enables a genre identification to take place. What interests me with Kings is the way it enacts its own transformations of the genres in question.

Generic tension in Kings

In the same way that Lukács focuses on particular aspects of the novel – biographical form, role of the hero, means of representation and irony – or the historical novel – mode of historical representation, character and social conflict – so also I will give attention to the specific features of Kings in order to seek what Lukács calls its historico-philosophical context.

Between prophetic cycles and royal narratives

The notable feature of Kings is the conflation of prophetic cycles and royal narratives, or even chronicles. In this respect it intersects with, on the one hand, other works such as Chronicles and Samuel, and on the other with the prophetic works of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Book of the Twelve.[19] In a broader perspective, 1 Kings 1–16 and 2 Kings 10–25 are primarily narratives concerning kings, whereas 1 Kings 17–2 Kings 9 focuses on prophets, specifically Elijah and Elisha. At the level of content, the arbitrary division between Samuel and Kings conceals the fact that royal narratives have been part of the books of Samuel since at least the appearance of David in 1 Samuel 16, if not Saul

[19] Thus, Long's designation of Kings as 'history' hardly does justice to the generic connections with prophetic books. Burke O. Long, *1 Kings, with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 7–8.

in 1 Samuel 9. Further, the splicing of prophets and kings runs throughout Kings itself, although not in the vast servings that I noted above. In the main royal narratives, prophetic stories appear at 1 Kings 1.8, 10–14, 22–7, 32–40, 44 (Nathan); 11.29–39 (Ahijah the Shilonite); 13.1–34 (the man of God and the old prophet of Bethel); 14.1–16 (Ahijah the prophet); 2 Kings 19.1–7, 19–34; 20.1–11, 14–19 (Isaiah the son of Amoz); 21.10–15 (Yahweh's servants the prophets); 22.14–20 (Huldah the prophetess); 23.15–18 (the man of God from Judah). Apart from 1 Kings 13 and 2 Kings 23.15–18, which I have suggested elsewhere functions as a 'national allegory',[20] each of these prophetic appearances is to deliver an oracle concerning a king; that is, the focus is on a particular king or kings. In the prophetic cycles oracles too appear concerning kings, especially Ahaz (Elijah), and Amaziah, Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, Jehu and Ahaziah (Elisha). However, by and large the stories concern the prophets themselves with hardly a king to be seen. The prophetic and royal narratives, then, are spliced closely together in Kings, so much so that the precise generic identification of this text remains problematic: for the Jewish canon it is part of the 'former prophets', whereas in critical Christian scholarship it is one of the 'historical books'.

Until now I have remained at the level of content, but what about form? The major formal feature of the royal narratives – especially 1 Kings 1–16 and 2 Kings 10–25 – is the enveloping of narrative accounts of the kings within the regular rhythm of formulae that mark the beginning and end of each reign.[21] The first of the formulae appear not with Saul but David (1 Kgs 2.10–12) and the last of the formulae for Mattaniah/Zedekiah in 2 Kgs 24.18–20, even though he was appointed by the Babylonian king. Gedaliah the governor is no king at this formal level, for he has no standard formula and flees to Egypt (2 Kgs 25.22–6). He disappears from the narrative, whereas Jehoiachin, who begins his reign with a formula (2 Kgs 24.8–9), has no closing formula. Instead,

[20] Roland Boer, 'National Allegory in the Hebrew Bible', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 74 (1997), pp. 95–116.

[21] See the detailed examination in Roland Boer, *Jameson and Jeroboam* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996).

the book itself ends with his release from prison in Babylon, a food allowance and status above the other exiled kings.

This feature – formula encasing royal story – also creeps into the prophetic cycles of Elijah and Elisha. Thus, the long narrative of Ahab is sandwiched by formulae in 1 Kings 16.29–34 (a much lengthier version that presages the narrative stretch to come) and 22.37–40. A cluster of formulae appear for Jehoshaphat (Judah) and Ahaziah (Israel) in 1 Kings 22.41–6, 51–3. A few more follow: 2 Kings 2.17–18 (Ahaziah and Jehoram); 2 Kings 3.1–3 (Jehoram of Israel); 2 Kings 8.16–19 (Jehoram of Judah), 8.25–7 and 9.29 (Ahaziah of Judah). At this level, it may indeed be argued that the prophetic narratives are stretched-out versions of the stories encased by the formulae elsewhere in Kings. Despite these similarities, there are some notable differences.

First, the various stories over the long run of Ahab's reign contain accounts in which he disappears entirely from the scene and Elijah himself comes to the fore: widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17.8–24), contest on Carmel (Chapter 18), retreat to the wilderness (Chapter 19) and so on. So also with Jehoram's reign, in which the prophetic stories with Elisha as the hero take on a life of their own – witness the Shunammite woman (2 Kgs 4) and Naaman the Syrian (1 Kgs 5). Second, even the regnal formulae buckle under the pressure of the string of prophetic tales, so much so that they descend into virtual nonsense by 2 Kings 8.16–19, where Jehoram morphs into Joram, and Jehoshaphat, at least in the Masoretic text, becomes king all over again with a second formula to kick off a reign that had already been well under way by 1 Kings 22.41–4. Third, the prophetic stories have a curious knack of bringing the kings of Israel and Judah together. Jehoshaphat and the 'king of Israel' (belatedly identified as Ahab only in the closing formula of his reign in 1 Kings 22.39) come together against the Syrians in 1 Kings 22.1–26. Jehoshaphat and Jehoram fight together against the Moabites in 2 Kings 3.1–27, and the distinction between Jehoram/Joram, son of Ahab and king of Israel and Jehoram/Joram, king of Judah, blurs (2 Kgs 8.16–29) – hence the old theories of a united kingdom under one king.

To sum up my analysis thus far, we have in Kings a profound tension between two genres, between historical narrative and prophetic texts. One way of proceeding would be to compare Kings with either the prophetic texts of Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel

and The Twelve, or with the contradictory theocratic 'history' of Chronicles. However, I want to focus on the tension within Kings, drawing out the features of this tension in an effort to outline what this curious text that is Kings might be. The features that point towards the ideological function of Kings include: narrative rhythm or time, the question of life and death, the function of Yahweh and of character as such and the 'historico-philosophical' moment of Kings.

Narrative rhythm

By narrative rhythm or time I refer to the stretching effect that the appearances of Elijah and Elisha have on the reigns of the kings in question. Both Ahab and Jehoram, during whose reigns the prophets appear respectively, have reigns that are Solomonic in textual space. It is as though their reigns are suspended, thinned out while six chapters pass, chapters crammed with one magical story after another concerning these two synonymous prophets. It almost seems that the regnal material, particularly the formulae, falls over itself to catch up when the time for Elisha to succeed Elijah draws near; now we have a staccato of formulae as the book of 1 Kings closes. By contrast, the accounts of the kings of Israel and Judah before and after this middle slab of prophetic text follow each other in condemned succession at a regular beat. Without fail, one dies and another follows. Only Solomon has a comparable, if not longer, suspension of the death notice. But I suggest that Solomon's story reads like a temporal pause before the beat of the text falls into its regnal rhythm once more.

The dialectical point here is not merely that the length of the prophetic narratives, that is, those concerning individual prophets, shows up the brevity of those of the kings: rather, a deeper ideological tension lurks in the text. The houses of Israel and Judah, or at least that of Judah, for all the condemnation that everyone apart from Hezekiah and Josiah receive, are ones that are supposed to be eternal. The promise to David is that there will never be a king lacking from the throne, that the throne of his kingdom will be established forever (2 Sam. 7.13–15). The well-known tension between this and the so-called conditional covenant that Solomon receives (1 Kgs 9.4–8) manifests itself in

the rapid turnover of damned kings. The rhythmic rapidity with which the kings keel over in disgrace puts immense pressure on the promise of perpetuity. Further, one function of Elijah and Elisha in the structure of the text is to provide examples of what the kings should have been. The two prophets are, in other words, the true successors of Solomon purely in terms of the temporal pattern and narrative content, highlighting the tension between the promise of eternity and the rapidity with which the individual kings fall short.

Prophets do not die

Narrative rhythm is of course a musical allusion that draws attention to what may also be called textual fill, or the physical arrangement of the text that determines how long it takes a reader to cover certain sections. A second feature of Kings, closely related to this first one, is the issue of life and death – precisely the sort of item on which Lukács focuses. When we peer more attentively at the prophetic cycles of 1 Kings 17–2 Kings 9, accustomed to the regular pattern by which kings come to the throne and then die, what stands out is that the prophets themselves do not die. Thus, in the drawn-out process of the succession of Elisha from Elijah it turns out that Elijah escapes death. As the narrative pushes towards the isolation and difficulty of Elijah's death, it is overloaded with signals that negate death. Elisha says, after Elijah's third effort to leave him behind, 'As Yahweh lives (*khay*) and as you yourself (*nephesh*) live (*khey*), I will not leave you' (2 Kgs 2.6). In the oath formula, Elisha swears he will stay, but it is the elision of Yahweh's 'living' and that of Elijah's *nephesh* that hints at what will happen to Elijah. And the threefold 'tarry here' that leads up to this declaration, when Elijah attempts to drop Elisha off on the way, has the undercurrent of a refusal of death. Just as Elisha refuses to 'tarry' (*shb*), so also Elijah himself will not remain in death. (The more obvious meaning here is that Elisha should stay behind, in this life with the prophets, and not follow Elijah in his own path.) The heavy symbolism of the parting of the water of the Jordan with Elijah's mantle, with its Mosaic echoes, links birth and death, amniotic fluid and the male act of penetration. Then the mythical language of verses 11–12 signals Elijah's transport beyond death. Not only does he move on rather than die, but he lives on

in Elisha, who now takes his mantle and repeats the water trick to return from the liminal space of death. Later Elijah returns for Elisha in the image of the horses and chariots of fire that defeat the Syrians (2 Kgs 6.15–19).

Nonetheless, Elijah's sidestepping of death is well known, along with that of Enoch and Moses. Less observed is the way Elisha also avoids death. Well after the end of the narrative concerning Elisha at the close of 2 Kings 9 comes the afterthought of the narrative of his death (2 Kgs 13.14–21). It begins with the notice, 'And Elisha was ill with the illness with which he was to die' (2 Kgs 13.14). It goes on to speak of Joash's lament that echoes with its 'chariots of Israel and its horsemen' both Elijah's step beyond death (2 Kgs 2.12) and the continued presence of Elijah with Elisha (2 Kgs 6.17). Is Elisha to repeat Elijah's death-defying stunt? Not quite. Rather, this death too is not to be of the usual sort. In his apparent death, he offers Joash a prophecy of partial victory over Syria, but the sign itself is mixed. The arrow shot out the window signals Joash's victory, but his striking of the ground only three times with the arrows (the ones remaining) points to a limited victory. However, there is also another arrow that Joash shoots out of the window to the east. Is this also a reference to Joash's victory (Syria lies to the north), or perhaps the direction of Elisha's own death? In the following verses, we have the curious account of his burial. In the context of bands of Moabites entering the land in the coming of the year, an unidentified man is also buried: 'And it happened that they were burying a man, and behold, they saw the band and they cast the man into the grave of Elisha. And the man went and touched the bones of Elisha and he came to life and stood upon his feet' (2 Kgs 13.20–1, my translation).

Apart from the darkly comical image of a burial being interrupted mid-stride, the pall-bearers unceremoniously dumping the body in the nearest grave in order to race off and stop these damned Moabites, I want to know why Elisha's grave is still open. Is this event meant to take place at the moment of Elisha's burial? The *waw* consecutive form, 'and they buried him' (2 Kgs 13.20) for Elisha's burial suggests not, for Elisha is well and truly buried before this indeterminate little account. Who is the unidentified 'man'? Elisha? The narrative distinguishes between them but then hints otherwise. It does so through the ambiguity of the subject of the verbs: 'and he came to life and stood on his feet' (2 Kgs 12.21).

It is unclear whether the subject is 'the man' who appears twice as the subject of earlier verbs, or Elisha, whose name comes immediately before that very phrase, 'and he came to life and stood upon his feet'. We do not need to decide either way, for both possibilities point towards Elisha's continued existence in weaker and stronger forms: his bones have revivifying or even resurrecting power *and* it is Elisha himself who stands on his own feet, alive again.

So, neither Elijah nor Elisha dies in these stories, at least in the sense of the kings who die all too regularly and are buried, mostly, with their fathers. Yet, the story of Elisha's continued power and life is not the only occurrence of revivification. Both Elijah and Elisha in closely paralleled stories bring a woman's son back to life (1 Kgs 17.8–24 and 2 Kgs 4.11–37), apart from a whole series of comparable accounts: rain on a dry earth (1 Kgs 18.45); fire from stone (1 Kgs 18.38); turning bad water into good (2 Kgs 2.19–22); the continuous flow of oil from the widow's jars (2 Kgs 4.1–7); the bad pottage (2 Kgs 4.38–41); the endless barley (2 Kgs 4.42–4); and the raised axe-head (2 Kgs 6.1–7). All of which suggests that the stories of Elijah and Elisha may be read as one continuous narrative concerning the same prophet, for Elisha bears Elijah's mantle and his *nephesh* that lives like Yahweh.

However, while the prophets never keel over themselves, and while they are busy bringing all sorts of things to life, they also deal in death. By now their targets should not be hard to guess: they prophecy and bring about death in all manner of gory variations, especially with Ahab and Jezebel, Ahaziah and Jehu, who wipes out the house of Ahab at prophetic command over two blood-stained chapters.

The character of Yahweh

Alongside narrative rhythm and the question of life and death, a third, typically Lukácsian, concern is that of character. In both *Theory of the Novel* and *The Historical Novel*, Lukács identifies the middling or average hero against the world-historical individual. In the former work such a hero provides the cohesion for a disintegrating world, whereas in the latter text this middling hero provides the mediation between great events, everyday life and the readers. It is hardly possible to apply this directly to

Kings, for in this text the major character types are male kings and prophets, whose dominance in the text is enhanced by female characters such as Jezebel, Athaliah, Huldah, Rehoboam's wife, the widow of Zarephath, the Shunammite woman and others. But there is a third character central to the whole text, namely Yahweh.

Let me begin by focusing on the contrast between prophets and kings, which will then bring us to Yahweh. Against the magical and all-powerful prophets Elijah and Elisha, whose feats range from raising the dead to life and calling down bears on little boys, from standing up to kings on pain of death to raising axe-heads, come the relatively ordinary and flawed kings who are rarely able to do a thing right. In respect of this contrast, I want to pick up a general theme of Kings on which I have written before: the tension that Yairah Amit has described as a 'dual causality', divided between divine and human characters.[22] In my earlier analysis I argued that 1 Kings 12 operates with such a dual scheme. The narrative of the breakup of the kingdom by Rehoboam and Jeroboam proceeds according to the closed world of human interaction. Thus, the request of the people for alleviation of Solomon's burdensome requirements meets with a declaration of even harsher measures by Rehoboam. In reply the people, under the leadership of Jeroboam, declare their independence from Rehoboam. But just when the story builds up a picture of human interaction and causality – king, people, older and younger advisors – the text slips in the deflating phrase, 'for it was a turn of affairs brought about by Yahweh' (1 Kgs 12.15). The introspective section that follows (1 Kgs 12.25–33) follows a similar tack, focusing on the introspective Jeroboam and his decision to set up golden calves for worship at Bethel and Dan, only to become the key narrative of the 'sins of Jeroboam' (see 1 Kgs 12.30). In what I termed, with a deliberate anachronism, the 'historical determinism' of Kings, I argued that the at times covert and at others more overt control of events by Yahweh generates a distinct ideological contradiction in Kings.

David Jobling's point – that this in fact describes a good deal of the Hebrew Bible, over against Amit's pseudo-historical effort to

[22] Boer, *Jameson and Jeroboam*, pp. 155–8; Yairah Amit, 'The Dual Causality Principle and Its Effects on Biblical Literature', *Vetus Testamentum* 37 (1987), pp. 385–400.

argue for an increased 'secularization' and its effects on Israelite literature – assists my argument.[23] If we focus on the question of character, the tension between divine and human 'causality' applies to the royal narratives throughout the books of Kings, most clearly in the tension between the regnal formulae where Yahweh's approval and disapproval is more overt and the narratives encased by the formulae. By contrast, the prophets face none of this tension, being in constant communication with a Yahweh who spends little time behind the scenes. In fact, it is precisely the prophets who bring the element of divine 'causality' squarely into the world of the kings.

The tension between human initiative and control by Yahweh is the constitutive factor in the characterization of the kings, for it renders them desultory and error-ridden, given to actions that attract Yahweh's condemnation, even though those actions are subject to Yahweh's control. The contrast between these characters and the prophets could not be sharper. The prophets are completely under Yahweh's direction, so much so that they manifest a curious array of divine powers, ranging from major collective events with profound religious import to trivial magical tricks. If Yahweh is more surreptitious in regard to the kings, then he swamps the narratives of the prophets. They become superhuman beings, at odds with the characters they encounter, whether kings, 'sons of the prophets' or widows. This is also a feature of the characterization of the prophets in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve, for their prime conversation partner is Yahweh. More often they function as his assorted mouthpieces, spouting forth his words but also following his directives. Despite the protestations of the commissioning narratives, the prophets are without sin. In the prophetic books and in Kings they are not condemned for disobedience to Yahweh. The so-called 'false prophets' (for instance, 1 Kgs 22.1–28) provide the counterpoint that reinforces the sinlessness of the sanctioned prophets.

This feature of prophetic characterization is so distinct from the kings who are full of sin and waywardness that it becomes one

[23] David Jobling, 'Right-Brained Story of Left-Handed Man: An Antiphon to Yairah Amit', *Signs and Wonders: Biblical Texts in Literary Focus* (J. Cheryl Exum (ed.); Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), pp. 125–31.

of the deepest contrasts in characterization in the text of Kings. But there is another character, Yahweh, who constitutes the major effort to resolve this contradiction at the same time that his own character bears all the marks of the contradiction itself. Yahweh is a unique character: there is only one of him and he dominates the others, retiring during the regnal formulae only to emerge at various points to guide events or pass judgement, either in the mouths of the prophets or in the narrator's own voice. He is everywhere in the prophetic cycles, speaking directly with the prophets and directing their every movement.

I am not so much interested in the way the narrator's voice and those of the prophets merge with Yahweh, or indeed how narrator and prophets merge into one, but rather how the interaction of Yahweh with the other characters has a profound effect on their characterization.[24] Yahweh ensures a hierarchy of characters, with primacy given, after himself, to the prophets, then to the select kings Solomon, Hezekiah and Josiah, and then the sinful rabble of remaining kings. In other words, the first level of the effort to deal with the contradictions between the prophets and kings is by means of this hierarchy of characters, which is determined by access to Yahweh and his approval. Yet, the contradiction within this mode of characterization is that Yahweh is the character who enables the characterization of kings and prophets in the first place. That is, the tensions I have traced thus far are contained within the figure of Yahweh, a vicious cycle within the text.

At a second level, the interaction between the major character-types in Kings touches on a much wider theological problem in the Hebrew Bible: the tension between divine control and human initiative. It is banal to read this in terms of the contradictory experience of 'God' that we find recorded in so many different ways in the Bible, or theologically as the contradictions of the human condition, for the initial form of the problem comes from texts like these. Rather, it indicates the workings of a particular ideological system, a cultural template that I will explore in the conclusion to this book. As far as this particular problem is concerned, the characters end up being either superhuman magical figures who sin

[24] Nelson's theological emphasis misses these tensions in the characterization of Yahweh. Richard Nelson, *First and Second Kings* (Louisville: John Knox, 1987).

not and are Yahweh's instruments, or they turn out to be characters who are so far from Yahweh that they can only be condemned. It seems to me that this is one of the key determining devices of characterization in Kings, which produces the contradictory characters of kings and prophets. Both become explorations in the two character types possible within this particular logic.

Ideological tensions and historico-philosophical consciousness

I close with two arguments. One concerns the way the tensions I have traced – in genre, life and death and character – begin to fall apart. The other concerns what Lukács calls the moment of historico-philosophical consciousness. The signals of collapse of the structure of Kings concerns two women, those who are both included and excluded from the overarching narrative. One is Athaliah, a queen mother and 'king', and the other a prophet(ess), Huldah. Notably, one belongs to the genre of royal narratives, while the other seems to be part of the prophetic cycles.

As for Athaliah, she rises from the gore-fest that follows the story of Jezebel, wife of Ahab (2 Kings 9–10). The massacre extends to Judah, and here Athaliah, the mother of the murdered Ahaziah, turns up. If Israel could produce a Jezebel, then Judah can go one better. But the problem here concerns succession to the throne. The solution that Athaliah represents in this situation – king's mother as ruler – presents a serious problem that the text must eliminate. In dealing with that problem, Athaliah shows up the anomalies of the whole character type of the king.[25] She rules for six years (2 Kgs 11.3) but for her there are no regnal formulae. In their place we find, at the beginning: 'Now when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the royal family' (2 Kgs 11.1). Then at the end: 'So all the people of the land rejoiced; and the city was quiet after Athaliah had been slain with the sword at the king's house' (2 Kgs 11.20). There is no burial or

[25] Brueggemann notes the 'discontinuity' signalled by Athaliah, but then describes her fate in purely political terms. Walter Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings* (Macon: Smith and Helwys, 2000), pp. 407–11.

notice of succession, even though Joash, who has been protected from her and rules after her, is her grandson. This is precisely where a succession notice would be most expected. But it cannot be in a text for which the succession must be from king to son. Nor is any theological judgement passed on her reign: she is, in other words, one of the 'kings' and yet not, outside the system and within, the one who must be eliminated to make the system work.

Athaliah fulfils a similar function to Huldah, being the anomaly that is the logical extreme of the character type of the king. In Huldah's case, this applies to the prophets. In many respects, Huldah is like any other prophet: mouthpiece of Yahweh, who condemns Judah but spares Josiah from punishment due to his obedience to Yahweh. Yet she delivers the last prophetic word in the book (2 Kgs 22.14–20) before the long-awaited destruction of Judah and exile of the royal house. Why does a woman deliver the death-knell, the final prophetic word in a long run of prophets who are all men? Only a woman can bring about that destruction, for the male prophets are unable to do so, constantly repeating the threat of destruction without actually bringing it about. They cannot, in other words, destroy the world that brings them to life as characters in the first place. Huldah is, therefore, both the means for the end of the strange world of Kings and its prophets and also the culmination of the character-type of the prophet. She provides the unravelling of both, precisely as the mouth-piece of Yahweh.[26]

Both Huldah and Athaliah signal the breakdown, the rattling to pieces of the tensions I have traced in Kings. The collision course of the two major character types, who themselves comprise the working out of the ideological problem that Yahweh constitutes, is in the end enacted by women. Or at least the threat of the collision and destruction of the narrative and ideological problem it represents must be transferred to the women, who become the extreme types of prophets and kings and can therefore function as the scapegoats through which the narrative may cohere.

I would now like to focus on the final item, that of the historico-philosophical context. I have followed Lukács's lead in many respects, focusing on the dialectical tensions of the text,

[26] In an otherwise useful commentary, Brueggemann simply misses this dimension of Huldah's narrative function. Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, pp. 546–7.

particularly in terms of genre: narrative rhythm, life and death, character and ideology. And yet, there remains Lukács's concern with the historical location, the historico-philosophical moment of such generic features. The problem with historical research on Kings is that history tends to be understood in terms of the chronicle-like happenings of states, rulers and their functionaries.[27] So we find the unabated search for the origins of Israel; when we can assume the narrative reflects the reality of kings in power; what imperial power invaded when; the difference between the first and second temple periods; and so forth. That this remains a hypothetical game should be obvious, for the evidence – textual and archaeological – remains thin on the ground. More rarely do we find concerns with the larger frame of economic and political patterns. That is precisely what I wish to do here.

I begin with a point I have mentioned earlier: ancient Israel arrived late on the scene, at some time in the first millennium (more specificity is hardly possible). It did so in a region, the southern Levant, that was marginal in economic, political and cultural terms.[28] In this 'poor and menacing land',[29] a little kingdom flashed briefly before becoming an imperial province. In that brief moment, it attempted to erect a system of estates – of palace and

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[27] John Day (ed.), *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel* (London: T & T Clark, 2004); Baruch Halpern, *The First Historians: the Hebrew Bible and History* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2003); David Halpern and André Lemaire (eds), *The Books of Kings: Sources, Composition, Historiography and Reception* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Steven L. McKenzie, *King David: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[28] Igor M. Diakonoff, 'Main Features of the Economy in the Monarchies of Ancient Western Asia', *Troisième conférence internationale d'histoire economique: The Ancient Empires and the Economy* (Moses I. Finley (ed.); Paris: Mouton, 1969), pp. 13–32 (29); John David Hawkins, 'The Neo-Hittite States in Syria and Anatolia', *Cambridge Ancient History* (John Boardman, et al. (eds), vol. 3: 1; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 372–441 (425); Niels Peter Lemche, *Historical Dictionary of Ancient Israel* (Lanham: Scarecrow, 2004), p. 8; Mario Liverani, *Israel's History and the History of Israel* (trans. Chiara Peri and Philip Davies; London: Equinox, 2005), pp. 6, 9–10; Albert Kirk Grayson, 'Assyrian Rule of Conquered Territory in Ancient Western Asia', *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (Jack M. Sasson (ed.); Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006), pp. 959–68 (967); Ianir Milevski, *Early Bronze Age Goods Exchange in the Southern Levant: A Marxist Perspective* (London: Equinox, 2011), p. 27.

[29] Liverani, *Israel's History and the History of Israel*, p. 6.

temple – that the small ruling class felt was needed for its own well-being. Labour was typically indentured, whether permanently or temporarily, so that the estates could be worked. Debt, the corvée, forcing people out of village-communes – these were some of the strategies used to secure labour in the face of ever-present shortage.

The catch is that this economic approach was belated and untimely. Elsewhere in ancient Southwest Asia, such estates had been sidelined. They continued to function, but newer forms of expropriation had come into play in the first millennium BCE. These included systematized plunder, tribute and exchange. The key was coinage, a by-product of the logistical problems of feeding armies. Once coins were invented (simultaneously and without knowledge of each other in China, India and Lydia), rulers demanded taxes in coin. Villagers and farmers had to find a way to obtain coins for taxation, so local markets spread in order to supply soldiers. With coins in hand, the farmers could now pay taxes, should they be enforced by the ever-shifting power of rulers. In this light, the estate system of the little kingdom of Israel was distinctly untimely and misplaced, harking back to former times. I suggest that this situation produced a curiously split situation, economically and culturally. The estate system sat strangely with the empires that invaded and demanded taxes, with the busybodies or middlemen – those merchants, tribute gatherers, lenders, landlords and diplomats all rolled into one – who passed through on their way between Mesopotamia, Egypt and the northern Levant. And before Israel could even think about installing anything like this at home, it became a province of those powers that used such an economic system.

The text of Kings then becomes an effort at a cultural and ideological level to overcome this economic tension. It appears at multiple and overlapping levels. The split in the character of Yahweh is one level, where absolute divine control (eternal prophets) sits side by side with relative powerlessness (mortal kings). The text would prefer the former, imitating the big kingdoms far away, but it betrays the truth that the latter is closer to home. Above all, the effort to overcome the tension appears at a formal level, in the generic tension I have traced throughout Kings. The effort to combine the two genres is doomed to fail, reproducing at a formal level the economic and political tensions that it faced. One distinct signal of that failure is the appearance of the 'king' Athaliah, who

is both part of the story of the succession of the kings of Judah and not part of the story, for she is denied the typical regal formulae. Even more telling is the prophetess Huldah, who speaks the final word of doom at the close of the books of Kings.

Summary

- The Hungarian Marxist, Georg Lukács, describes the novel as a literary effort to overcome the problem of a 'world abandoned by God'.
- He also argues that social and political conflict generates tensions to which literature responds.
- The tension between two genres the books of Kings – royal and prophetic narratives – may be analysed in terms of Lukács's interest in generic tension.
- Another level of this tension is that while kings die regularly, prophets do not die.
- In terms of character, the tension is between God and the other actors in the stories.
- These tensions may be seen as complex and intersecting ideological efforts to overcome the belated appearance of Israel in ancient Southwest Asia.

7

Theodor Adorno: The logic of divine justice in Isaiah

Adorno may well be one of the most rigorously consistent practitioners of dialectical thinking in the whole Marxist tradition. For those weary of sloppy thinking and undemanding texts, Adorno's sustained intellectual discipline comes as something of a relief, a reminder that it is possible to keep to such a high standard. Most appealing is his sheer bloody-mindedness, the rigour and discipline, the need to get on with the job without fuss, and the intellectual and practical commitment to Marxism as the best possible option in the current situation, both intellectually and politically. This may explain why he numbers among the greatest philosophers, Marxist or otherwise, of the twentieth century. Over a relatively short life (1903–69), Adorno was extremely productive and influential, especially in the post-war reconstruction of Germany, where the Left emerged, for a time at least, with the credentials of having opposed fascism from the first. The exiles returned from around the world, including the Frankfurt School of Social Research from its wartime domicile in the United States, to wrestle for the intellectual, moral and political leadership of a young generation tainted by the Third Reich.

As with the other critics I deal with in this book, my use of Adorno is quite specific. In his *habilitationshrift* and first philosophical work, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*,[1] Adorno

[1] Theodor W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* (trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989 [1933]).

argues that Kierkegaard ends up with insuperable paradoxes in his effort to base a philosophy, ethics or aesthetics on theology. In a similar fashion, I argue, the common assumption that the divine justice found in the prophets, especially Isaiah, provides the basis for social justice faces comparable paradoxes that render any connection between divine and social justice highly problematic. The elements of Adorno's approach that I outline below before turning to Isaiah include his practice of immanent criticism, his development of the dialectic that comes out of the Hegelian–Marxist tradition and an attention to theology that often surprises Adorno scholars. As with my discussion of Bloch, I suggest that one of the benefits for biblical criticism of Adorno's work is the need for a thorough theological demystification.

Immanent criticism, dialectics and theological suspicion

Adorno's texts are by no means easy, so some patience is required to understand him. Indeed, the study of Kierkegaard has baffled nearly all commentators, who usually give up at the end of the first section of the book.[2] We will need to go further in order to see how Adorno works. His comments on his method of interpreting Kierkegaard are as good as any introduction to his practice of immanent criticism: 'There is no way to meet up with him in the fox kennel of infinitely reflected interiority than to take him at

[2] For instance, Buck-Morss notes that she cannot follow the 'full intricacies of Adorno's argument'. Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: The Free Press, 1977), p. 221. Others follow suit. Max Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), pp. 140–9; David Sherman, *Sartre and Adorno: The Dialectics of Subjectivity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), pp. 21–3. Henning's detailed study is more useful for setting the context than close attention to the text. Christian Henning, *Der Faden der Ariadne, Eine theologische Studie zu Adorno* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1993). Astonishingly, Brittain's book, which focuses on Adorno and theology, does not discuss this core text in Adorno's theological engagements. Christopher Craig Brittain, *Adorno and Theology* (London: Continuum, 2010).

his word; he is to be caught in the traps set by his own hand.'[3] In other words, this approach uses the text's or author's own terms, resisting the temptation to make the work under investigation fit into a predetermined framework. Yet, in a dialectical turn, Adorno argues that even this immanent approach is itself drawn from Kierkegaard, for his is a Christian theological exegesis (*christlich-theologische Exegese*). Indeed, this approach is based on the interpretation of biblical texts: 'at every point Kierkegaard's statements refer to texts that he held to be holy'.[4] Now we come a full turn, for it becomes apparent that one of the sources for Adorno's own immanent criticism is biblical exegesis. Nonetheless, the purpose is not to 'exposit' the authoritative text's own meaning, but to locate its internal contradictions, the impossible moments that undo the text's ideological construction. These are the 'traps in the fox kennel' I mentioned earlier. Only through a complete immersion in the content and method of the text under investigation is it possible to identify the contradictions by which an interpretation can move forward: 'every insight into Kierkegaard is to be wrung out of his own context'.[5] But this means that an immanent interpretation is also very much dialectical, for in Adorno's hands it becomes the means for pursuing the contradictions until they give out their 'truth-content', which for Adorno is the 'concrete' situation, without which thought is impossible.

As for dialectics, there is nothing quite like the relentless dialectical moves of Adorno, encapsulated in the content and structure of virtually every sentence he wrote. A general outline of dialectics may be found in the introduction to this book, but Adorno provides his own version. Hegel may have transformed dialectics into a mode of philosophical thinking, with its *Aufhebung* or 'sublation': it is simultaneously an end and a beginning, an annulment and a preservation that shifts the whole problem onto a new plane. Here the original problem ceases to be what it was, but it is also absorbed into the new situation where yet other questions arise and the dialectic continues its task. Marx may have given Hegel's dialectic a materialist turn, standing Hegel's idealist dialectics

[3] Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, p. 11.
[4] Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, p. 12.
[5] Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, p. 13.

on its feet, grounded in society, politics and economics. But in Adorno's hands, the dialectic operates by pushing the oppositions, anomalies and contradictions to their extremes. When they run beyond where they ever though they could go, arriving panting and sweating, a mediation opens up between the opposed terms and a deeper level of connection. In this way, a concept begins to show glimpses of its opposite, transformed in the process that identifies what has been excluded as the key to the concept itself. Perhaps the most well-known example is the argument concerning barbarism and enlightenment in the text Adorno co-authored with Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Englightenment*.[6] Here they pursue the various modes in which apparently enlightened culture (from the ancient Greeks onwards) actually turns out to include barbarism in its very structure. That is, one cannot have enlightenment without increasing barbarism. Another form of the dialectic for Adorno is to seek the moment of profound dissonance between things that appeared unified and harmonious. As a very different example, he tackles what we now assume to be the norm in films: they combine picture and sound in an effortless whole. However, when talkies first appeared, Adorno argues that the apparently natural combination of picture and sound actually produced a stilted effect. There was something very unnatural about the combination, so movie-makers introduced musical scores to distract our attention from that stiltedness.

The final feature of Adorno's approach involves what I call theological suspicion. This suspicion is intimately connected with and in many ways reliant upon Marxist ideological suspicion (see the 'Introduction'), but Adorno reshapes that practice with an eye on theology.[7] That suspicion operates by means of critical discernment, in which one is constantly on the watch both for the subtle effects of theological modes of thought and for the possible genuine contributions theology may make.

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[6] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (trans. Edmund Jephcott; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002 [1947]).

[7] Roland Boer, *Criticism of Heaven: On Marxism and Theology* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2009 [2007]), p. 394.

The balefulness of myth

I would like to provide two brief examples of Adorno's approach, particularly in its exercise of ideological and theological suspicion. The first is drawn from the joint work with Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, especially the chapter on the myth of Odysseus (from Homer's epic poem). For Adorno, such a myth is largely baleful. Myth is characterized by deception, false clarity, fixation, domination, exploitation and the repression necessary for individual subjectivity to emerge. In light of the situation in which Adorno did much of his work – the Nazi appropriation of myths of the *Volk* to claim that human civilization began in northern Europe – we can understand the suspicion of a Marxist of Jewish background.

The part of the Odysseus myth that interests me concerns the episode of the Sirens and then that of the Cyclops.[8] Following instructions from Circe, the sex-goddess, Odysseus blocks the ears of his rowers with wax so they will not be tempted and seduced by the sirens' song. As for himself, Odysseus orders them to tie him tightly to the ship's mast, so that he can be tempted by the song but not be able to respond. When Odysseus hears the song, he of course begs and cries out to his men to release him, but they calmly row on, oblivious to their master's cries. How should we understand this myth? As a moral tale of the need to forego the temptation of pleasure for the sake of a higher cause? A caution to exercise discipline and self-control? Adorno and Horkheimer bring their ideological suspicion to bear.

For them, this myth is a prime instance of the dialectic of myth and enlightenment. They identify the following: a) the separation between those who labour and the rulers who do not, and at the same time the subjection of the former to the latter; b) the rationalization and organization of labour, which now takes place under compulsion, without pleasure and without being able to communicate concerning one's situation; c) the separation of the enjoyment of art and manual labour – Odysseus can hear and contemplate the beauty of the song, but the rowers cannot; d) the

[8] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, pp. 25–9; Homer, *The Odyssey* (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 165–200 (XII: 1–72).

distinction between intellect and sensuous experience, in which the latter is subjected to the former. To sum up, already we have in the myth of the Sirens the master-slave dialectic that Hegel made famous: proletarians who can no longer hear or understand what their situation is and an immobile master trapped in the cycle of domination.

The myth is less appealing than it once was. But when we come to the story of Polyphemous, one of the Cyclops, we find that myth itself is the problem.[9] They point out that the source of the Cyclops' remarkable power is that they are older than the gods. They come from a world before the law and social organization; so they may lack obvious laws of civilization (eating human beings and fending for themselves), but they show compassion to animals and to one another. Odysseus, by contrast, shows no compassion. Why the difference? Law, organization and civilization are functions of domination, and the prime location where such features of domination appear is in myths. They tell the stories of the defeat of older ways of life and the establishment of law and the organization of society, which require the subjugation of many human beings to the few. As I argued in my *Political Myth*,[10] the Hebrew Bible provides excellent examples of this process. For instance, the major myth that runs from Genesis to Joshua tells of the suppression of rebellion, the delivery of the law, the emergence of a state, conquest of a land, the organization of society and the relations between the sexes. In the case of Odysseus, the shift in the narrative that takes Odysseus from Circe, who tries in vain to get him to stay, to Penelope marks the transition from matriarchy to marriage: woman becomes both courtesan and wife.[11] Myth does not come through such analysis with flying colours, and it is worth tarrying with the analysis of Adorno and Horkheimer to see how baleful myth can be.

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[9] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, pp. 50–4.

[10] Roland Boer, *Political Myth: On the Use and Abuse of Biblical Themes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

[11] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, pp. 54–9.

The problem of scripture

While the analysis of Odysseus is an exercise in ideological suspicion, the criticism of Kierkegaard is an excellent example of the closely related theological suspicion. Adorno seeks to uncover the theological underlay – the 'false consciousness' – of Kierkegaard's philosophical system with a view to demolishing that system. In this case, a dialectical reading brings out what is normally hidden in the text. What Adorno's reading enables us to do is to push the text, especially its interpretation, to yield up precisely these dimensions, which are always there but not recognized. Adorno's argument in general makes three points: Kierkegaard's retreat into objectless inwardness cannot avoid history; his theology constantly slips back into the myth it perpetually represses; the paradoxes of theology eventually break up the possibility of any system based on theological categories. Here lies the dialectical point of Adorno's criticism, for although European philosophy is inescapably tied to theology, he is profoundly suspicious of the value of a theological base for philosophy. Such a criticism entails an intense immersion in theology that locates its contradictions and then works through them.

However, I do not wish to reprise the whole argument here,[12] so I focus on one specific part that concerns Kierkegaard's use of the Bible. He is caught, argues Adorno, between the historical particularity of this ancient text and his theological assumptions concerning its status. One the one hand, the Bible itself is subject to historical contingency, to a 'historical deterioration'[13] whereby its specific historical meaning has faded and become difficult to decipher; on the other hand, Kierkegaard is committed to a powerful theological assumption concerning the nature of this text. If God, the one ultimately responsible for this text, is unchangeable and trustworthy, then he must continue to speak to us through the Bible. The problem for Kierkegaard is that he is not a dogmatic theologian, for whom the 'symbolic word' (*symbolischen Wort*) – note the Christological allusion – unifies signifier and signified.

[12] See Roland Boer, 'A Totality of Ruins? Adorno on Kierkegaard', *Cultural Critique* 83 (2013), pp. 1–30.
[13] Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, p. 25.

Instead, the Bible's historical loss of meaning must be handled in other ways.

Kierkegaard's proposed way of overcoming this contradiction – between historical particularity and eternal word – is to read the text as a cipher (*Chiffre*): 'Implicit in Kierkegaard's metaphor of scripture is: the unalterable givenness of the text itself as well as its unreadableness as that of a "cryptogram" composed of "ciphers" whose origin is historical.'[14] The Bible is then a cryptogram composed of ciphers, so how does one understand it? The problem to be overcome is that history produces a 'fissure' between the cipher and truth. Soon enough, this break introduces a further break between the text and the individual who seeks that truth. The truth-seeking individual finds that the meaning of the text he or she reads begins to decay, so that meaning 'separates from the cipher in the text'.[15] The text has become more inaccessible than ever.

So what is Kierkegaard's solution? He resorts to the psychology of the individual in order to go back and recover, existentially, the lost meaning of the text. Only a radical retreat into inwardness, into the inner workings of the soul and thus the privatization of faith, is able to experience the text's meaning. Here one touches the existential experience of the text's own writers and readers, as individual faith and individual faith meet across the millennia. One may then experience the 'affects'[16] of the text, which become in Kierkegaard's work the existential experiences of anxiety and despair, which are the marks of sin and damnation. The problems with this approach are many. To begin with, this radical inwardness is an effort to escape the effects of history, in which the meaning of that cipher, the Bible, is lost. Yet, Kierkegaard's inwardness betrays the history it seeks to escape, for inwardness is a characteristic of that distinct historical creature, the bourgeois. With the ideological primacy of the private individual, who is supposed to be the basis of all else, Kierkegaard gives voice to the ideology of a specific and at his time still new class within capitalism. Yet as he does so, he also expresses the ideological crisis of that position, which is the

[14] Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, p. 25.
[15] Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, p. 26.
[16] Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, p. 26.

anxiety and desolation of the individual burgher and thereby the unauthenticity of the capitalist world he or she inhabits.

Further, Kierkegaard's attempted solution is inescapably theological and thereby idealist. Briefly put, the criticism is as follows: if we grant Kierkegaard his inwardness, then the individual subject is its own ground. It cannot be established on anything but itself, and the movement of subjectivity can involve only an oscillation, out and back in again, in what is a poor substitute for the dialectic. Or rather, Kierkegaard's inversion of Hegel's dialectic is not materialist (Marx), but idealist, based on a radical interiority. And idealism cannot create or produce anything, let alone the individual subject that is a basis of Kierkegaard's thought. The existential subject is about as able to manage auto-generation, to produce itself, as a man is able to create himself from nothing. This is the impossible trap of a method based on theology, for it cannot escape the logic of the system: the effort to overcome a contradiction regarding the Bible that was generated out of theology itself (God's unchangeable word in history) can only produce a solution that is itself theological and thereby remains caught in the contradiction.

I have offered these two examples of Adorno's approach in order to provide models of my reading of Isaiah 5, although in terms of method rather than content. Like Adorno, I develop an immanent approach to the text, an approach that does not seek to make sense of difficult material by importing suggestions from outside but rather works through such difficulties in order to locate the tensions and paradoxes within the text. These tensions then lead to a dialectical analysis that operates with a sustained theological suspicion.

The paradoxes of divine justice

Isaiah 5.8–23 begins with a well-known call: 'Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land.' It continues to list a series of injustices, visited by the rich on the poor, and to answer them by statements of divine judgement. This is a text that suggests any notion of social justice is based upon divine

justice, and that any subsequent form of social justice, however secular, may be traced back to prophets like Isaiah, or indeed like Amos or Micah.[17]

Class woes

I argue that the connection between social and divine justice, made explicit in texts like Isaiah 5, faces a number of paradoxes. This text as a whole is the well-known 'song of the vineyard', although it is more of an allegory *avant la lettre* with the interpretation of the various items in the allegory itself provided in Isaiah 5.7. Nevertheless, I will begin in reverse with the 'woe' oracles of vv. 8–23 that follow the explication of the parable of the vineyard. Here we have a distinctly socio-economic criticism of those with, or those who abuse (the distinction is important), wealth and power. To deploy a Roman term, the text speaks of *latifundia*, the use of debt burdens to appropriate land and its usufruct at the expense of those in debt: 'woe to those who join house to house and field to field until there is no more room' (Isa. 5.8). We may see here the expansion of palatine and temple estates by landlords and palace functionaries, estates that use indentured labour in

[17] Marvin L. Chaney, 'Bitter Bounty: The Dynamics of Political Economy Critiqued by the Eighth-Century Prophets', *Reformed Faith and Economics* (Robert L. Stivers (ed.); Lanham: University Press of America, 1989), pp. 15–30; Marvin L. Chaney, 'Whose Sour Grapes? The Addressees of Isaiah 5:1–7 in the Light of Political Economy', *The Social World of the Hebrew Bible: Twenty–Five Years of the Social Sciences in the Academy (Semeia 87)* (Ronald Simkins and Stephen L. Cook (eds); Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), pp. 105–22; Marvin L. Chaney, 'Micah – Models Matter: Political Economy and Micah 6:9–15', *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in its Social Context* (Philip Esler (ed.); London: SCM, 2005), pp. 145–60; Matthew J. M. Coomber, *Re–Reading the Prophets through Corporate Globalization: A Cultural-Evolutionary Approach to Economic Injustice in the Hebrew Bible* (Piscataway: Gorgias, 2010); Matthew J. M. Coomber, 'Prophets to Profits: Ancient Judah and Corporate Globalization', *Bible and Justice: Ancient Texts, Modern Challenges* (Matthew J. M. Coomber (ed.); London: Equinox, 2011), pp. 213–37; D. N. Premnath, 'Latifundialization in Isaiah 5:8–10', *Social-Scientific Old Testament Criticism* (David Chalcraft (ed.); Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 301–12; Christoph Onno Schroeder, *History, Justice, and the Agency of God: A Hermeneutical and Exegetical Investigation on Isaiah and Psalms* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Mark Gray, *Rhetoric and Social Justice in Isaiah* (London: T & T Clark, 2006).

order to feed and supply the small non-labouring ruling class. In order to expand, they seize the productive agricultural land of the village communities and force the farmers to work on the estates. However, for Isaiah the economic and social effects are negative: inhabitants are thrown out and a dramatic drop in production ensues, with vineyards and grain crops inadequately cultivated (Isa. 5.9). Ultimately, the appropriating landlords will suffer, for their own houses will lie desolate and their vineyards and grain crops will not produce what they expected. Yet this way of looking at the situation keeps God out of the argument, except as one who is part of the economic process itself. As far as Isaiah is concerned, the two can hardly be separated from one another, for the distinction between economic and divine cause would have been entirely foreign and anachronistic in an economic system where the sacred provided the very framework of the world in which people lived and moved. In this respect there is a seamless connection between divine and human justice, or rather, between the sacred and the economic, so much so that economic depredation was a sacred or theological problem that required urgent divine attention. For this reason, the economic practice of *latifundia* brings a condemnation from Yahweh in the mouth of the prophet.

The woe oracles that follow identify various social and economic ills, rather than the apostasy and worship of idols that we find in Jeremiah or Ezekiel, or elsewhere in Isaiah. So, there are criticisms of grog and partying that result in lack of knowledge, food and water (Isa. 5.11–12), criticisms of double-speak (5.20) and the cultivation of falsehood and sin (5.18–19), self-knowledge (5.21), drinking and legal corruption (5.22). These woes begin slowly and with more detail (5.8–17), only to tighten up in a staccato of condemnations (5.18–23).

While these woes appear to be a series of moral denunciations, a distinct class element appears that points towards the first paradox of Isaiah 5. Who are 'those who rise early in the morning that they may run after strong drink, who tarry late into the evening till wine inflames them' (Isa. 5.11)? Who are the party animals who do not 'regard the deeds of Yahweh or see the work of his hands' (Isa. 5.12)? Are they the latifundiaries of vv. 8–10? Only in v. 14 does the class identifier appear, namely the 'honoured' or the 'nobility' (*hadar*). Along with this nobility are 'her multitude', 'her throng' and 'he who exults in her' (Isa. 5.14). The feminine third person

possessive pronoun to all the nouns, including 'nobility' (*hadarah*), refers back to the earlier 'Sheol'. And so the greedy landlords are really the 'honoured of Sheol'. The point here is a class critique: only those who do no work but exploit the work of others, that is, the owners of the means of production, have time to drink and party, and the dire socio-economic effects are the result of their exploitation. The 'honoured of Sheol' must therefore be read as a derogatory term for this class, so all of the apparently moral denunciations become class-specific: they carouse, appropriate productive land, sin, abuse religious privilege, call evil good and vice versa, are wise in their own eyes and corrupt the legal system for their own benefit. They are 'haughty' (Isa. 5.15), heroes at drinking wine (Isa. 5.22) and guilty of wholesale corruption and injustice.

The paradox of the vineyard

Herein is the first paradox, for the entire prophetic denunciation is directed at one class. While this class criticism provides plenty of resources for those who seek social justice in the Bible, the paradox arises precisely when we turn to the allegory of the vineyard that precedes and sets the context for the woes. The allegorical interpretation of Isaiah 5.7 identifies the vineyard as the 'house of Israel', the vineyard itself as belonging to 'Yahweh Sabaoth' and the plantings of the vineyard as the 'man of Judah'. In v. 3 appear the 'inhabitant of Jerusalem' (*yoshev yerushalaim*) and again the 'man of Judah' (*'ish yehudah*). The woes that follow immediately after v. 7 are therefore directed at these groups, which one initially might read as the whole people.[18]

The problem begins with the tension between the house of Israel in vv. 3 and 7 and the ruling class of vv. 8–23: the text seems to identify this class as the whole people, an ideological slip that implicitly recognizes the power of ruling-class ideology. But I need to ask whether there really is an inconsistency in this text. Others, such as Matthews and Chaney, argue that the text is quite consistent, although they need to work hard to maintain

[18] So Marvin Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39, with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 130.

such a position.[19] Matthews uses evidence of viticultural practices in ancient Southwest Asia to explain the effect of the allegory to its original audience, whereas Chaney brings together social scientific material, comparison with other Isaiah oracles, as well as generic and lexicographical analysis in order to argue for a consistent criticism of ruling-class practices in Israel in Isaiah's time. The text is a major source for Chaney's wider search for social justice in the Bible.[20] Apart from the historicist assumptions of their readings, both studies operate on the unexamined presupposition that the allegory must be consistent and must make sense. Thus Chaney, when faced with the problem of terminology I have noted, especially the 'man of Judah' and 'inhabitant of Jerusalem', wants to specify the terms to focus on the ruling elite: the former as a small body of large and powerful landholders and the latter as ruler(s) of Jerusalem. Matthews engages is a massive effort of filling in what he feels to be the missing pieces in order to render the allegory consistent. My inquiry differs precisely on the question of consistency, for it seems to me that the tensions and paradoxes are the most interesting part of Isaiah 5. And the paradox is between the ruling classes identified in the woes and the whole people of the terms 'O man of Judah', 'O inhabitant of Jerusalem' (in both cases the most common usage) and 'house of Israel'. The problem is that as far as the ruling classes are concerned, they are the whole people and their ideas are the ideas of the whole people, whom they epitomize, control and exploit.

This particular tension, between ruling and ruled classes where the former ideologically subsume the latter, means that the expectations of Yahweh in v. 7b are meant for the owners of the means of production, the landlords and others who come in for such a

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[19] Victor H. Matthews, 'Treading the Winepress: Actual and Metaphorical Viticulture in the Ancient Near East', *Semeia* 86 (1999), pp. 19–32; Chaney, 'Whose Sour Grapes? The Addressees of Isaiah 5:1–7 in the Light of Political Economy', pp. 105–22.

[20] See also Chaney, 'Bitter Bounty: The Dynamics of Political Economy Critiqued by the Eighth-Century Prophets'; Chaney, 'Micah – Models Matter: Political Economy and Micah 6:9–15'; Marvin L. Chaney, 'The Political Economy of Peasant Poverty: What the Eighth-Century Prophets Presumed but Did Not State', *The Bible, the Economy, and the Poor* (Ronald Simkins and Thomas Kelly (eds), *Journal of Religion and Society Supplement Series 10*; Omaha: Creighton University, 2014), pp. 34–60.

hammering in Isaiah 5.8–23. It is to these that Yahweh looked for 'justice' (*mishpat*) and for 'righteousness' (*tsedaqah*), but ended up, in a word play, with 'bloodshed' (*mispakh*) and 'a cry' (*tse'aqah*). Social justice, at least of the kind identified here, is something in which the rich and powerful engage, an economic and social agenda that is the responsibility of the ruling class. It is they who must show mercy to the widow, orphan and foreigner in the land, in much the same way that the kings must exercise justice.

An extraordinarily limited form of social justice, is it not? Trickle-down justice, to gloss a term from capitalist economics. It is an ethics of the rulers in which the marks of social cohesion and economic prosperity are 'fair' practices by the rulers so that those at the bottom of the class system, and even those who do the bulk of the work, do not suffer unduly or beyond their capabilities. The issue for Isaiah 5 is adequate maintenance for those who labour on the estates so that they will be in a bearably fit state to do the labour required of them. One must keep the exploited alive so that they can continue to be exploited. This vision of social justice is an extremely limited one that supports the status quo – by seeking the conditions for its continuity – rather than questioning and challenging that situation for its intrinsic exploitation and lack of social justice.

Isaiah's trenchant criticism is a denunciation of a class that fails to ensure the workings of trickle-down social justice, for this system will work to their best advantage. Paradoxically, the condemnation and judgement delivered to them leads to their restoration – if they heed the prophetic word – or to their destruction, and thereby of the socio-economic system itself. It is a destruction they have in a glaring moment of stupidity brought upon themselves. Isaiah's text may be read as a direct ideological effort to deal with, as Marx would suggest, the inherent contradictions of an exploitative economic system.

The paradox of love

Thus far I have skirted the explicit theological material in Isaiah 5, focusing (like Adorno in the first section of his Kierkegaard book) on the social and economic paradoxes of the text. In the allegory of Isaiah 5 the question of Yahweh's role becomes explicit. The

identification of Yahweh as the creator of the vineyard (Isa. 5.7) throws all of what has gone before that verse in a different light.

The allegory of vv. 1–6 concerns love and punishment, which provide a translation of righteousness and justice. In tone, image and vocabulary, the allegory has a similar feel to the Song of Songs. It is, after all, a 'love song' sung by an unidentified first person for 'my beloved' (Isa. 5.1), drawn from love poetry for an allegorical purpose.[21] It concerns 'his vineyard' – the third person is telling. In the first two verses, Yahweh appears in the third person and the prophet himself is in the first person. Thus, Yahweh becomes the prophet's 'my beloved' or 'my lover'. However, in v. 3, the voices shift, for now Yahweh speaks in the first person. He calls on the 'inhabitants of Jerusalem' to judge 'between me and my vineyard'. The effect is quite stunning, for the first and third persons, prophet and Yahweh, crash together into a unified first person. The prophet becomes once again the speaking machine for Yahweh.

Although a rapid skim suggests that the whole allegory concerns Yahweh's love for his vineyard Israel (the aromas of love do tend to waft over into the later verses), the shift in pronouns and verbal subject breaks the connection. Verses 1 and 2 are about love, but the only love is that of the prophetic first person *for* Yahweh, 'my beloved', for whom he sings the love song. A second paradox emerges: the basis for social justice in the love of Yahweh – which seems to the basis for connecting the earlier and later parts of the chapter – begins to dissipate. Unwittingly, the text of Isaiah 5 echoes Adorno's criticism of Kierkegaard, that divine love and ethics are incompatible, that one cannot base an ethics on a theological premise such as love.

Instead, once the distinction between the first and third person of vv. 1 and 2 closes, the allegory shifts from the theme of love

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[21] Yee and Graffy argue that Isa. 5.1–7 is a juridical or self-condemnation parable, although they separate it from the woes of Isa. 5.8–23. Gale A. Yee, 'The Form-Critical Study of Isaiah 5:1–7', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43 (1981), pp. 30–40; Adrian Graffy, 'The Literary Genre of Isaiah 5,1–7', *Biblica* 60 (1979), pp. 400–9. If genre itself is understood as a dialectical category, bringing two or more genres together in tension, as I argued in my chapter on Kings, then its connections with love poetry become part of the juridical form. Indeed, Sweeney argues that the genre here is composite, with an allegory and prophetic judgement speech combined. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39, with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature*, pp. 126–8.

to judgement. With the unified first person that begins in v. 3, judgement formulae creep into the text, entirely severed from the words of love. Thus, Yahweh does not construct the vineyard out of a love that is then rejected by Israel, and that Yahweh, like some disappointed lover, sadly punishes. The only reason, as far as the text is concerned, why Israel should produce 'grapes' rather than 'wild grapes' is that Yahweh has made the vineyard in the first place: 'What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done it?' (Isa. 5.4a).

Although there is a caesura between love (Isa. 5.1–2) and judgement (Isa. 5.3–4), so that the latter cannot follow from the former, what does carry through is the idea that Yahweh has made or created Israel. Thus, in v. 2 Yahweh digs and clears, plants with choice vines, constructs a watchtower and wine vat. This is what Yahweh does for the vineyard (Isa. 5.4), and the dismay of vv. 2b and 4b is based on the expectation that this work of construction should produce the expected yield: 'he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes' (Isa. 5.2b); 'When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?' (Isa. 5.4b) The echo here is backwards and forwards, back to the 'choice vines' of Isa. 5.2 and ahead to the 'pleasant planting' of Isaiah 5.7. The 'grapes' expected are 'justice' and 'righteousness' (Isa. 5.7), but all that came of it were the 'wild grapes', bloodshed and a cry. To complete the allegory, the 'choice vines' of v. 2 are the 'men of Judah', the 'pleasant planting' of v. 7. So it is the men of Judah who are expected to yield the grapes of justice and righteousness, but they do not. Why should they produce such yield? The only reason is that Yahweh has made them, the vineyard. Thus, purely from the fact that Yahweh has created Israel comes the assumption that they should exercise justice. There is no reference to commandments to be followed, divine directives that the people studiously avoid at their own risk and for which punishment is deserved.

Between cultivation and rottenness

All of which leads to the extraordinary third paradox: if Yahweh has constructed the vineyard in order to yield grapes, the only reason for the unacceptable yield is Yahweh himself. A flaw in the cultivation itself leads not to cultivated grapes but to wild

grapes. Without any commandments or directives that the people have to follow, the onus cannot be on the people themselves. And without the connection between the love of vv. 1 and 2 and the judgement in vv. 3 and 4, the reason for the wild grapes cannot be the rejection of Yahweh's love for Israel and Judah. The justification for an ethics of social justice begins to rattle to pieces: righteousness and justice must flow from the creation and cultivation of Israel and Judah, but if they, especially the ruling classes who come in for such a hammering, do not exercise such justice it is not because of their own sin – there is no room for that theme in the allegory – but because Yahweh has not cultivated them in a way that would result in righteousness and justice. Once again, the effort to base an ethics of social justice on theological premises faces a paradox.

In light of the two paradoxes of the allegory itself – the rift between love and judgement and the U-turn that places the reason for the absence of social justice on the vineyard cultivator – the third stanza (Isa. 5.5–6) floats free in the theological vacuum. These verses, again in the divine first person, outline the punishment that crashes down on the vineyard: Yahweh will remove its hedge, break down its wall, make it a waste, avoid pruning or hoeing, encourage briars and thorns to grow and order the clouds not to rain on it. The echo of Eden is strong, although the punishment does not follow from any human disobedience in Isaiah 5.

Even though vv. 5 and 6 speak of the vineyard, there is a jarring mismatch between the various acts of cultivation in v. 2 and the promised destruction of vv. 5 and 6. Yahweh's ventriloquist does not threaten to undo the items listed in v. 2: un-dig it, scatter the stones, rip up the vines, knock down the watchtower and fill in the wine vat. Instead, none of these items from v. 2 are picked up in the punishment of vv. 5 and 6. Initially, this may be read as a signal of the breakdown of the allegory's theological logic, the discontinuity between one part and another, here between vv. 2 and 5 and the themes of love and justice. But if we look further, another motif begins to emerge.

The first sign of this motif is the distinction, in vv. 2 and 4, between 'grapes' (*'anavim*) and 'wild grapes', or more specifically putrid or rotten things (*be'ushim*, from *b'sh*, to stink). In other words, the distinction is between cultivation and wildness, culture

and nature. Yahweh seeks to cultivate a vineyard so that it will produce cultivated grapes, but only the putrid grapes of nature result. The allegory thus falls into Lévi-Strauss's schema of what distinguishes human society from the lack of such society. In his vast structuralist analysis of 187 South American myths, *The Raw and the Cooked*, Lévi-Strauss argues that the passage through to social formation is marked in the myths by the passage from raw to cooked food.[22] By contrast, in nature, food makes a transition from fresh to rotten (the sense of *be'ushim* in Isa. 5.2, 4). In his brilliant fashion, Lévi-Strauss is able to read a whole variety of myths – concerning jaguars, crocodiles, lizards, birds and so on – in terms of this fundamental process.

A comparable process appears in the early verses of Isaiah 5 with their tension between cultivation and rottenness or wildness. Yahweh's dismay and anger result from the absence of a cultivated product, or rather, from the rotten and putrid products which emerge from his cultivated vineyard. The danger that must be avoided is, in other words, nature itself, that stark other to the cultivating desire of Yahweh. This tension between nature and culture carries through and makes sense of Isaiah 5.5–6, for Yahweh promises to remove the boundary – the hedge and wall – between cultivation and wild nature. The remaining acts in v. 6 – to make the vineyard a waste, desist from pruning and hoeing, allow briars and thorns to grow and the withholding of rain – all seek to return the cultivated vineyard to the status of wild nature, with its process from fresh to rotten, from which it has been wrested. After all, if grapes go rotten in the wild, then what is the point of all the cultivation if it produces rotten and putrid grapes? The appropriate raw materials produce an appropriate product! As if to say: these Israelites are obviously not cultured or civilized, then let them return to their pre-civilized, wild way of life. In this respect, the punishment is entirely deserved, except that it runs up against the previous paradox in which only Yahweh can be held responsible for the grapes produced by his construction and cultivation.

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[22] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked: Introduction to a Science of Mythology* (London: Pimlico, 1994).

To the paradox of Yahweh

The question of cultivation and culture leads to a fourth paradox when Isaiah 5.7 and the woes of Isaiah 5.8–23 are brought into the equation. The implication is that the cultivated 'grapes' – justice and righteousness – are elements of human civilization, and that their absence is a sign of lack of cultivation, of the process of nature itself towards putrefaction. On one level, the connection between civilization and justice is a profound insight, for how can human beings live together in society without social justice, without fair dealings between one human being and the other? All of the woes can then be seen as the causes and signs of the breakdown of human society.

Further paradoxes, however, start mounting up. First, Isaiah 5 presents justice as the result of cultivation, rather than as a necessary component, if not pre-requisite, thereof. How can society function if justice is not there to begin with? Second, it restricts justice to the realm of human society, with all its borders that mark it off from barbarity and wild nature. Yet, elsewhere in Isaiah (such as Isa. 11.6–9) the region beyond the borders of human society is where peace and justice prevail. To be sure, what happens in the eschatological passage of Isaiah 11 is that the various features of civilization extend and dominate wild nature itself. The eschaton becomes one vast civilized and cultured space. In such a space the possibility that nature may have its own form of order outside human society is closed down. My point is not entirely fair, however, since it brings a criticism to a conceptual structure in which this possibility is not available. But it does run up against the Isaian theme that Yahweh is the creator of the whole of nature. Therefore, Yahweh is the creator of injustice within wild nature.

The restriction of social justice to human society, or the extension of human society into nature, leads to the deepest paradox of Isaiah 5. In tracing the first paradox earlier I argued that the woes are targeted at a particular class – the rulers or owners of the means of production – for not exercising a trickle-down form of social justice, one which they dispense from a position of power and wealth. In their lack of social justice they therefore slip outside Yahweh's cultivation and back into wildness and barbarity. Human society breaks down when *this* class fails to act with justice and righteousness. Their injustices are the putrid grapes that appear in

Yahweh's cultivated vineyard, and for this reason he returns it to the wild state of nature.

The problem here is that Isaiah's assumed model of cultivated society is profoundly reactionary. The aim of the prophetic denunciations is to urge the ruling classes to act with justice and righteousness, that is, distribute favours so that society can function. But what sort of society? Is not the properly working society envisioned here profoundly unjust? A social and economic system that is structured in terms of those who control the means of production and extract the surplus labour from those who work for them is hardly a system overflowing with social justice. In fact, the opposite is the case, and a complete inversion of Isaiah's ideological schema is about to take place.

If this society is functioning properly, at least for the text of Isaiah, then it is unjust and unfair. But the realm of injustice and barbarity is outside cultivated society, in the arena of wild nature. Thus, nature comes crashing through the boundaries to become the determining feature of culture, whereas culture leaps over the wall and hedge to take up its proper abode in nature. Or, culture itself, the cultivated society, is unjust and unrighteous, whereas nature is where justice and righteousness may be found. The whole ideological structure of Isaiah 5 collapses under its paradoxes. In light of this breakdown, the refrain from Isaiah 5.2b and 4 has its own peculiar logic. Of course the cultivated vineyard produces rotten grapes (injustice and unrighteousness) because this is exactly how such a 'cultivated' society in Isaiah works. The return of nature in the punishment of vv. 5 and 6 is an implicit recognition of the paradox that this cultivated society in fact operates according to the injustices of nature. Except that nature is now the place of justice…

There is one final paradox in the collapse of the effort to link social justice with Yahweh. The cultivator of the society gone awry is Yahweh himself, the great mechanism of social 'cohesion'.[23] The ideological function of Yahweh is therefore as an engineer of a profoundly unjust society, for he is the one responsible, as I argued

[23] In Miscall's otherwise excellent commentary, he misreads the song of the vineyard as a condemnation of human practices. Peter D. Miscall, *Isaiah* (2nd edn; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006), pp. 42–4.

earlier, for the character of the vineyard itself. In contrast to this earlier paradox, in which Yahweh has created and cultivated the vineyard and is therefore the one who created it flawed, Yahweh now cultivates a society that is anything but just and righteous. Rather than a flawed production, he has succeeded only too well and the result is precisely what one would expect, given the reactionary ideological basis on which this vineyard, this culture, has been constructed. His problem is that he expected the wrong thing, cultivated grapes, since the only fruit that could possibly grow in his vineyard are the stinking and rotten grapes. But this faulty expectation is but a mark, a figure, of a text riven with paradoxes it cannot contain.

All of this means that the derivation of social justice, at least as far as Isaiah is concerned, is paradoxically impossible. Instead, Yahweh has become the source, creator and cultivator of injustice and unrighteousness. His only way out would be, in Isaiah's terms, that he is also the creator of nature, where justice now abides, but that is outside the walls of the human society he seeks to cultivate. He is, as it were, trapped in his own paradox.

I close by returning to the woes with which I began in Isaiah 5.8–23. In that earlier discussion I treated them as criticisms of the rulers of a social structure – albeit an oppressive one – that was not functioning properly, that is, in terms of a trickle-down notion of social justice in which the poor and needy must be grateful for what they get, a society of alms-giving and limited amelioration of the more atrocious extremes of unjust human society. However, in light of the subsequent run of paradoxes that I traced in Isaiah 5 these woes now undergo their own inversion. They have become a perfectly good description of the cultivated vineyard of the earlier verses in Isaiah 5. Is not this the way a cultivated vineyard, the realm of culture and civilization as Isaiah views it, operates? And is this not precisely the vineyard of injustice that, after all the inversions and paradoxes of the text, Yahweh himself creates?

What I have argued with regard to Isaiah 5, by means of Adorno's immanent method, becomes another element in the various ideological features I have been pursuing in the previous chapters. In this case Isaiah 5 becomes an excellent example of the paradoxes of a ruling ideology held together by the figure of Yahweh. Isaiah's text may then be read as an effort to overcome these paradoxes, an effort that shows them up even more sharply in

the attempt at resolution. I leave the question concerning the social and economic tensions that generate such paradoxes for a fuller consideration in the conclusion.

Summary

- Theodor Adorno's rigorous method involves immanent criticism (taking the terms from the text under analysis), theological suspicion and dialectics.
- Two examples involve his (and Horkheimer's) suspicions of the reactionary nature of myth and the impossible paradoxes of Kierkegaard's use of the Bible.
- Isaiah 5 has been used as a biblical basis for social justice.
- However, the text faces numerous paradoxes – through the vineyard, divine love, cultivation and the character of Yahweh – which reveal it as a ruling-class text that advocates 'trickle-down' welfare.
- For this text, Yahweh becomes the ideological glue for a ruling class keen to appear benevolent.

8

Ernst Bloch: Anti-Yahwism in Ezekiel

Ernst Bloch presents almost too much for the biblical critic. A Marxist writer who not only read the Bible avidly but kept himself up to date with biblical criticism, who reflected deeply on the Bible in his major works and drew much of his vocabulary and concepts from it, who argued for the importance of the Bible in any politics of revolutionary liberation and socialist construction, and who wrote a book on the Bible itself. The inseparability of Bloch from the Bible means that I can add another category to my discussion – the major elements of Bloch's biblical hermeneutics – alongside the more usual treatment of major ideas and methods and their relevance for the Bible. After this, I consider his philosophical hermeneutics of utopia, his own strategy of biblical interpretation drawn from the more general programme, and then the deeper question of religious commitment and the study of sacred texts.

Although the most obvious way to deploy Bloch's insights would be to focus on the thread of 'murmuring' and insurrection that runs through biblical myths and stories,[1] I propose to make use of Bloch in a different way. This feature may be described as anti-Yahwism, or protest atheism. That is, against the depictions of God as a god of white terror, as one who sides with petty

[1] For a detailed assessment of these dimensions of Bloch's work, see Roland Boer, *Criticism of Heaven: On Marxism and Theology* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2009 [2007]), pp. 1–56.

potentates and an oppressive ruling class, one may trace the development of a protest against this deity which is at the same time a protest against a reactionary ruling class. After outlining some of Bloch's core ideas, I focus on Ezekiel 20.1–38, where the impossible words of Yahweh emerge from Ezekiel's mouth. Here Yahweh becomes a god who provides laws that are impossible to follow, for to do so involves condemnation, while not to follow them has the same result. Like Chapters 16 and 23 with their 'pornoprophetics', they depict Yahweh in such a way as to suggest resistance to the very idea of Yahweh.

From utopia to atheism

The Bible was one of Bloch's great inspirations, ranging from sustained exegesis of biblical texts to the pervasive presence of biblical vocabulary and phrases in his writing, often not acknowledged explicitly. For instance, any reader of the magisterial work, *The Principle of Hope*,[2] soon notices how often and for how long Bloch sustains his biblical analyses. And he is one of those Marxists who wrote a book on the Bible, the enthralling *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom*.[3] Indeed, I would suggest that some of the deepest currents in his work – especially the key idea of the utopian – could not have been thought without the Bible.

Dialectical hermeneutics

I would like to focus on three themes from Bloch's work: dialectical interpretation, the detective work of biblical interpretation and the idea of protest atheism. The most consistent thread that runs through all his work is the search for a glimmer of utopian hope – in literature, folklore, myth, architecture, nursery rhymes,

[2] Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* (trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight; Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995 [1959]).

[3] Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom* (trans. J. T. Swann; London: Verso, 2009 [1968]).

popular culture, music, of all ages and places. For Bloch, utopia is both a philosophical principle and a hermeneutical strategy. As for the philosophical principle, Bloch's reshaping of utopia sought its progressive, revolutionary dimension. This move counters conservative utopias, which tend to regress, to long for a lost golden age. These regressive utopias are caught in a dialectical trap: the past becomes the basis for utopia by means of denying the role of the past in determining the present system against which the Utopia is posited. In other words, the future is but a return to pristine origins, bypassing the undesirable present. Of course, that ideal past is pure fabrication, for the past proposed by conservatives is far removed from any reality. Against the longing for a mythical past, Bloch argued for an orientation to the future. If the past seems to contain a utopian moment – Eden or Paradise, the secret guild of masons who look back to Solomon's temple as the ideal model, the Island of the Blessed, Atlantis and so on – then their energy derives not from the past, according to Bloch, but from the utopian vision of the future. In other words, he sought a discovery of the future in the past. The central philosophical category in Bloch's system is therefore the future, the *Novum*, a radical openness to a future that cannot as yet be imagined, formulated except in terms of myth and story.

Alongside the philosophical category of the future, where we can debate the relative truth claims of different utopias, there is also the hermeneutical category. A utopian hermeneutics seeks the various unexpected utopian fragments and glimpses in the ruins of the present, even in the worst ideological and cultural products available. In such a dialectical reading strategy, many negative and unredeemable items turn out to be concealing a positive and utopian moment. In other words, the negative is crucial for the positive to be there: only by means of an oppressive moment can the positive emerge. Yet, even the moments that presage a utopian future do so not through their immediate content but through their finite nature; even hope itself is driven forward not by what is hoped for but by 'a dissatisfaction at the very core of hope'.[4] It is therefore possible for the most reactionary and violent political

[4] Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton Universitty Press, 1971), p. 138.

programme to function as a figure for a utopian community: in this way one may make an ethical assessment while not giving up on utopia itself (apart from being able to account for the continued presence of the negative). The world may be understood in the light of such a hermeneutics as a vast thesaurus of traces or figures of utopia, particularly in the commonplace human experiences of everyday life.

As should be obvious by now, this hermeneutics is a dialectical process. Rather than read utopian elements off in a direct fashion, Bloch was also interested in dystopia, in the trajectories that produced images and hints of oppression and exploitation, of tyranny, empire and domination. Even so, this is not quite dialectical enough, for it assumes that utopian and dystopian elements are clearly marked, that they have clearly visible identity tags on them. In some situations this may be the case, but Bloch gives the whole approach a further twist, for the overtly utopian texts may have a distinctly dystopian outcome. For instance, the image of the promised land, intrinsic to the story of the Exodus in the Bible – a text central to Bloch's own work – bears within it a mandate for dispossession and destruction of the people in the land. Inversely, I have argued in other places that Chronicles may be read as utopian (or rather, 'uchronian') politics, that its agenda is one of rereading the story of Israel in order to cast it and the future that arises from it in utopian terms.[5] Yet, the result is a thoroughly dystopian text, which excludes women, is extremely hierarchical and painfully pious and has in its theocracy of immediate divine retribution an absolutely repressive state apparatus. This is where the hermeneutics of suspicion begins to function properly, to watch more carefully for the negative within what appears to be utopian. The obverse, however, is also the case, since it becomes possible to locate a distinctly utopian moment in the most debased and degraded items, in clearly dystopian texts and products. As with the deceptively utopian material, one needs to look for signals

[5] Roland Boer, *Novel Histories: The Fiction of Biblical Criticism* (2nd edn; Atlanta, Georgia: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006); Roland Boer, 'Utopia, Dystopia and Uchronia in Chronicles', *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 9 (2009), pp. 9–13; Roland Boer, 'Of Fine Wine, Incense and Spices: The Unstable Masculine Hegemony of the Books of Chronicles', *Representations of Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond* (Ovidiu Creanga (ed.); Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), pp. 20–33.

other than the overt content for such utopian hints in the midst of dystopia. If I return to my example of Chronicles, it is not so much the content itself and the mechanisms of producing that are important, but in the very act of thinking and writing about a collective possibility in the first place, radically distinct from the surrounding political and economic situation. One may, then, find within an unredeemably dystopian text a formal or perhaps gestural hint of utopia itself, without valorizing the content in any way.[6]

Detective work

In contrast to the other Marxists we meet in this book, Bloch has a distinct practice of biblical interpretation of his own. Part of Bloch's agenda is to argue for the importance of the Bible in response to the Marxist rejection of it along with theistic belief. Not only was it the book of the communist peasants and workers, but it is a book full of revolutionary gunpowder. The key feature Bloch wishes to introduce into biblical criticism – this in the 1950s and 1960s – is the category of class, since the Bible is a text of both those who labour and those who live off that labour and do none themselves. In all its variety and contradictions, biblical stories have found a home in the smallest of peasant households, but also in those of the overlords and religious professionals. Class differences do not merely indicate different reading strategies: the texts themselves tend in either direction, their content and form speaking with a double voice, one that is and is not folly for the rich and powerful.[7] The Bible is then a text riven with class conflict,

[6] This approach involves a far more dialectical understanding of what has, under the influence of Paul Ricœur, been called a hermeneutics of suspicion and recovery. These terms will be somewhat familiar to those who work in certain types of biblical studies and theology: reformist feminisms, postcolonial studies, but also a whole series of strands of liberationist theological and biblical studies for whom the agenda remains that of a recovery of the text, a way of holding onto its ultimate value for religious communities. See Paul Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

[7] Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom*, pp. 9, 14.

between oppressors and oppressed, rulers and ruled, those who do no labour and live off the surplus from those who do labour.

In *Atheism in Christianity* Bloch both uncovers the way ruling-class ideologies have been imposed on the text and examines the patterns of subversive slave talk. The interlacings, overlays and myriad complexities of such materials require readings that are attentive to the subtleties of the texts. Thus, Bloch is interested in subversive texts that have been altered by later authorities and which may be recovered, as well as texts that have been rendered subversive through later usage. The one that survives is the masked text: 'it wears its mask, rather, from below, and wears it freely, as a first form of alienation, a characteristic change of ground'.[8] Such texts have a double function, a 'sly irony', appearing to appease the rulers while openly criticizing and lampooning them. 'Men often spoke in parables, saying one thing and meaning another; praising the prince and praising the gallows to prove it.'[9]

As an example of the complexity of such readings, Bloch offers an interpretation of Korah's rebellion in Numbers 16, a text that as it is now speaks of a priestly rebellion, centring on the issue of ritual and incense, which is crushed through divine intervention. As the story stands, it is an account of a 'premature palace revolution'[10] within the priestly upper class, but what catches Bloch's attention is the way the revolt is dealt with: God opens the ground which swallows them up as an example to anyone else who would rebel, who would burn incense before the Lord. This is not a God of war, waging a fight for survival, but a God of 'white-guard terror',[11] one who emerges from the redactor's pen. Nonetheless, an echo of political rebellion reverberates through the text. Not

[8] Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom*, p. 2.

[9] Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom*, p. 3. We can see here a much earlier and more sophisticated form of the proposals by James Scott concerning 'weapons of the weak' and 'hidden transcripts'. James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

[10] Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom*, p. 67.

[11] Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom*, p. 68.

only does the punishment itself signal this, but the perpetual recurrence of the Israelites' grumbling throughout the chapter indicates for Bloch a subversive, rebellious, anti-Yahweh voice that has been turned into something else – the sign of disobedience and recalcitrance on the part of the people themselves. Bloch undertakes this kind of reading again and again, sifting through the text by means of a dialectical hermeneutics of class. It leads him to argue for two concepts of God, one 'which has the *Futurum* as its mode-of-being' and the other that 'has been institutionalized down from above'.[12] The latter, with its radical transcendence, patterns of submission and atonement, is the one against which the rebellions of the text are directed.

Biblical criticism is in Bloch's hands detective work, identifying the murmuring versus tail-wagging, rebellion versus domination. Such criticism is, in other words, a political tool, with the various traditions and layers of the Bible full of politics and economics. Although he finds major elements at the ideological centre of the Bible, especially the Exodus and the Apocalypse, he assumes that by and large the dominant textual traditions are those of official power, priestly establishment and institutions. They are the ones who impose ideas, political and economic domination and negative representations of the people. At the same time, he locates the alternatives, the possibility of opposing the hierocratic system of control and oppression. So, he focuses on the murmuring of the people against Moses, the trenchant prophetic critique of political economics, the early forms of Christianity rejected and persecuted by the early Church, such as Gnostics and Ophites (who championed the serpent in the Garden, saw the God of the Hebrew Bible as an evil power, a demiurge who sought to ensnare human beings within this world). These items indicate a healthy revolutionary tradition in the Bible. All of which leads Bloch to posit a distinct, although highly diverse, thread, potentially revolutionary, anti-ruling class, anti-powerful, anti-wealth, that appears in many different guises throughout the Bible. This thread challenges the oppressor's texts, in which Baal and Yahweh become one, where the literary elites work tirelessly as ideologues for the ruling class.

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[12] Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom*, p. 68.

Atheism and biblical criticism

By now it should be obvious how the theme of protest atheism is part of Bloch's biblical interpretation. He has an unflagging zeal for anything that serves to raise and value human beings: 'only critical attention to the *veiled* (and, in Exodus, *ineradicable*) *subversion* can bring to light the organon of the non-theocratic axis in the Bible'.[13] All that rails against theocracy and its attendant hierocracy, against transcendence and obedience, and against the diminution of human beings has a distinct logic that sends it on a path beyond the Bible. He wants to bring the *homo absconditus* out of hiding and he does so through a number of strategies. One is a dialectical inversion of key theological categories: the *Deus absconditus* is in fact a cipher for the human being who remains hidden under the dominant religious systems of the Bible. Uncovering the suppressed rebellions of the Bible will bring that being into the open. Another is the argument that the God-hypostasis needs to be placed on its feet: 'God' is merely a hypostasis of what human beings can and will be, the utopian possibility of a transformed human nature. This is a temporal, horizontal transcendence. A third way, and this is the burden of *Atheism in Christianity*, is to argue that the various protests against Yahweh or Elohim in the Bible contain what may be called protest atheism. Impossible within biblical ideologies that are saturated with the sacred, such atheism can only emerge later, after that world has closed down. The protest against God carries with it the assumption that human beings can only emerge in their full potential when everything that draws away from this potential and makes human beings subservient to something or someone else has been dispensed with. Thus a religion that raises human beings up from submission to powerful overlords, as Bloch finds in various parts of the Bible, is one that will wither away once the lords of this and any other world have gone. It is precisely this type of promise and hope that he finds in the Bible and in no other religious literature.

What does protest atheism look like in the Bible? Bloch understands certain representations of God as key ideological features of the ruling classes. Thus, on behalf of those classes, the God of

[13] Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom*, p. 69.

the Bible represses rebellions by the people. If these representations of God are inseparable from such an ideological system, then opposition to God is opposition to the system. Conversely, bucking the rulers is also a challenge to this God. This argument brings us to Bloch's central theological argument, derived very much from the Bible: if human beings are to realize their full potential, to bring about a change in human nature and to end exploitation, then that involves not only smashing the ruling class, but also rejecting the gods who form part of their ideological structure. Protest atheism is then the outcome of this internal biblical process; or, the religious logic of the Bible, namely a utopian longing for human transcendence, is towards such atheism. When theism becomes a justification for an oppressive status quo, protest atheism is the mode of rebellion.[14] This Bloch finds within the Bible, but especially in the fulfilment of the religions of the Bible.

Anti-Yahwism in Ezekiel

In my discussion of Ezekiel, I hold together two elements of Bloch's work: the dialectics of utopia and the implicit protest atheism of the Bible. In other words, I ask, what is utopian about Ezekiel, especially offensive texts such as Ezekiel 16 and 23? And I ask whether Ezekiel too manifests a form of protest atheism, especially in Chapter 20.

Pornoprophetics in Ezekiel 16 and 23

Ezekiel 16 and 23 were part of an intense discussion in the 1990s and 2000s of what Athalya Brenner has dubbed 'pornoprophetics',[15]

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[14] Conversely, when atheism becomes an oppressive state ideology, protest theism may become a mode of rebellion, as argued by Max Horkheimer, *Critique of Instrumental Reason* (trans. Matthew J. O'Connell et al.; New York: Continuum, 1996), pp. 34–40.

[15] Athalya Brenner, 'On Prophetic Propaganda and the Politics of "Love": The Case of Jeremiah', *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (Athalya Brenner (ed.), *The Feminist Companion to the Bible*, vol. 8; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), pp. 156–74.

which she defines as the degrading representations of women in prophetic texts that legitimate male power. Other texts included in this debate are Isaiah 40–55, Jeremiah 2, 3 and 13, Zechariah 5.5–11, Nahum, Malachi, as well as a concentration on Hosea.[16] I do not want to quibble with the definition of pornography (the objectification and degradation of women based on unequal power that encourages abuse of women and renders female sexuality as one of servitude), although it is restricted to heterosexual pornography, includes an instrumentalist understanding of graphic and written texts and does not consider the range of debate.[17] What interests me here is the way Yahweh becomes an abusive character, particularly through the use of the marriage metaphor for the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Not only does a question hang over those responsible for such representations in authoritative sacred texts, but the question is also directed at Yahweh himself, as Bloch points out.

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[16] Gerlinde Baumann, 'Prophetic Objections to YHWH as the Violent Husband of Israel: Reinterpretations of the Prophetic Marriage Metaphor in Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40–55)', *Prophets and Daniel* (Athalya Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)*, vol. 8; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 88–120; Brenner, 'On Prophetic Propaganda and the Politics of "Love": The Case of Jeremiah'; Chris Franke and Julia M. O'Brien (eds), *Aesthetics of Violence in the Prophets* (London: T & T Clark, 2010); Mayer I. Gruber, 'Nineveh the Adulteress', *Prophets and Daniel* (Athalya Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)*, vol. 8; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 220–5; F. Rachel Magdalene, 'Ancient Near Eastern Treaty-Curses and the Ultimate Texts of Terror: A Study of the Language of Divine Sexual Abuse in the Prophetic Corpus', *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (Athalya Brenner (ed.), *The Feminist Companion to the Bible*, vol. 8; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), pp. 326–52; Sharon Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors in Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Julia M. O'Brien, 'On Saying "No" to a Prophet', *Prophets and Daniel* (Athalya Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)*, vol. 8; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 206–17; Ulrike Sals, 'Reading Zechariah 5.5–11: Prophecy, Gender and (Ap)Perception', *Prophets and Daniel* (Athalya Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)*, vol. 8; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 186–205; Mary E. Shields, 'Circumcision of the Prostitute: Gender, Sexuality, and the Call to Repentance in Jeremiah 3.1–4.4', *Prophets and Daniel* (Athalya Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)*, vol. 8; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 121–33.

[17] See Roland Boer, *Knockin' on Heaven's Door: The Bible and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 53–70.

Thus, Magdalene writes, 'Within these verses, God, characterized as male, is regularly threatening, in judgement, to rape, or otherwise sexually abuse, the cities of Israel, Judah and their neighbours, all characterized as female … God is an active perpetrator of such sexual violence against women in the Hebrew Bible.'[18] In the end, however, these are 'patriarchal views of God'[19] that need to be opposed. Baumann concludes that 'in the entire book of Ezekiel, however, YHWH as husband does not deviate from his role of imposing (and carrying out) the death penalty on his wife'.[20] For Shields, the body, rhetoric and gender characterization mask Yahweh completely in Ezekiel 16.1–43: 'this chapter represents a portrayal of God's character, which is, to say the least, difficult to reconcile with the picture of God's abundant love and mercy which many commentators would read into the text.'[21] A major dimension of Shields's essay is to show how both the woman and Yahweh are characterized by means of gender. As the first-person subject of the passage, the woman is constituted as a subject only in Yahweh's speech, which simultaneously enables his elision from view. The difficulty with such an I–you structure, argues Shields, is that it prevents any distance that allows one to question God (hence most criticisms have focused on the metaphorization of women). And the reason for such an absence of questioning, structured by a text that obscures God, is that 'if we dare to look at his character, we will be repelled by what we see'.[22] Following Weems's *Battered Love*,[23] Shields faces the problematic nature of God's character, although unlike Weems she finds no redeeming features.

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[18] Magdalene, 'Ancient Near Eastern Treaty–Curses and the Ultimate Texts of terror: A Study of the Language of Divine Sexual Abuse in the Prophetic Corpus', p. 327.

[19] Magdalene, 'Ancient Near Eastern Treaty–Curses and the Ultimate Texts of terror: A Study of the Language of Divine Sexual Abuse in the Prophetic Corpus', p. 352.

[20] Baumann, 'Prophetic Objections to YHWH as the Violent Husband of Israel: Reinterpretations of the Prophetic Marriage Metaphor in Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40–55)', p. 97.

[21] Shields, 'Multiple Exposure: Body Rhetoric and Gender in Ezekiel 16', p. 137.

[22] Shields, 'Multiple Exposure: Body Rhetoric and Gender in Ezekiel 16', p. 150.

[23] Renita Weems, *Battered Love: Sex, Violence and the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995).

God is 'abusive, wounding and cruel'.[24] But even Shields refuses the conclusion to which her argument moves, suggesting that texts like Ezekiel 16 need to be deconstructed so that they no longer can be used to justify religious points of view that sanction male violence and abuse. Such a deconstruction leads to the conclusion that Yahweh does not have absolute power, for he becomes the female figure – an argument fully developed in her study of Ezekiel 23.[25]

In the end, Shields does not want to take Bloch's step, preferring to hang on to God and seek 'constructive theologies which are non-violent and non-abusive'.[26] So also does Moughtin-Mumby seek a way to redeem the text, now in terms of releasing sexual metaphors from the constraints of the marriage and cultic prostitution metaphors with which much of this material has been read.[27] While the point concerning the diversity of metaphor is well made, the agenda is one of redeeming sex and relationships themselves – in all their variety – by means of the Bible. Without such an explicit theological agenda, Runions uses René Girard's material on mimetic desire to reread the metaphorical language of Ezekiel 16 so that it 'can no longer be used as normative for violent gender relations by those who read the Bible as instructive'.[28] Runions does so by recasting Yahweh as a parent (man or woman) with sexual preferences for men and by interpreting the woman as a surrogate victim in an economy of desire and violence, all through a sophisticated analysis of the interplay between the literal and the metaphoric. For Runions, Yahweh becomes both a male homosexual figure with desire for the nations and a feminine heterosexual parent of the child, especially in Ezekiel 16.1–13. The deity's violence towards a woman who is no longer the sexual object of male desire is the result of the deity's inability to deal with mimetic desire. The

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[24] Shields, 'Multiple Exposure: Body Rhetoric and Gender in Ezekiel 16', p. 152.

[25] Mary E. Shields, 'An Abusive God? Identity and Power, Gender and Violence in Ezekiel 23', *Postmodern Interpretations of the Bible: A Reader* (A. K. M. Adam (ed.); St. Louis: Chalice, 2001), pp. 129–51.

[26] Shields, 'Multiple Exposure: Body Rhetoric and Gender in Ezekiel 16', p. 155.

[27] Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors in Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel*.

[28] Erin Runions, 'Violence and the Economy of Desire in Ezekiel 16:1–45', *Prophets and Daniel* (Athalya Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)*, vol. 8; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 156–69 (157).

woman herself is not a wife of a jealous husband but a prostitute who becomes a surrogate victim, a scapegoat, a quasi-sacred figure who can be sacrificed for the community. This is the character Runions wishes to reclaim from a jealous and violent God, but she focuses her liberating reading on the woman without asking what it means for the character of Yahweh in Ezekiel.

In sum, little sympathy may be found for Yahweh in many feminist readings of Ezekiel – or indeed in others like those of Robert Carroll or David J. Halperin[29] – in contrast to the sympathy of traditional theological scholarship. However, while that resistance if not revulsion at Ezekiel 16 and 23 may bear an implicit protest atheism, interpretations are not pursued to that final moment.

The traps of Ezekiel 20: Statutes that were not good

In that respect, Ezekiel 20 provides a distinct moment where protest atheism may indeed gain a voice, especially if we read it with the assistance of Bloch's insights and his theological suspicion. Although Ezekiel 20 is not usually one of the texts included under 'pornoprophetics', it does push what I want to call an atheistic logic to its extreme. At the same time, I also argue that there is a utopian drive in Ezekiel, especially in Chapter 20, but that this utopian element is hardly what we would expect.

In Ezekiel 20 we find that the narrative of Yahweh's dealings with Israel piles various episodes on top of one another in a rising crescendo that ends with the enforced return and faithfulness of

[29] Robert P. Carroll, 'Desire Under the Terebinths: On Pornographic Representation in the Prophets – A Response', *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (Athalya Brenner (ed.), *The Feminist Companion to the Bible*, vol. 8; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), pp. 275–307; David J. Halperin, *Seeking Ezekiel: Text and Psychology* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993). Halperin's argument, that the arbitrary and cruel God of Ezekiel is the result of the prophet's sexual pathology (a terror of female sexuality), is interesting because it questions God directly. However, the effort to psychoanalyse a supposed 'historical' person on the basis of ancient texts in order to find a mode of healing from such pathologies is open to all sorts of problems. Psychoanalytic readings of texts hardly need to anchor themselves in a hypothetical individual.

Israel. The initial impression may be that Yahweh is the patient one in the face of Israel's wilful disobedience, so that Yahweh must reluctantly punish Israel only to restore the people from their punishment. Indeed, the refrain of Ezekiel 20.9, 14 and 22 stresses the perpetual delay in punishment, but the content of that refrain suggests a curious motivation. Yahweh is not patient or kind or loving, or even full of mercy: 'But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they dwelt, in whose sight I made myself known to them in trying to bring them out of the land of Egypt' (Ezek. 20.9; see vv. 14 and 22). What sort of motivation is this? Ego-centred and vain? The key Ezekelian themes of Yahweh's name and avoiding embarrassment among the nations appear here in full force.

Already this initial impression of Yahweh's patience begins to disintegrate down. Yet, if we look at the text more patiently, a fourfold pattern emerges only to break down with the forced redemption. The first four episodes, beginning with 'Thus says Yahweh' (Ezek. 20.5) and 'Then I thought' (Ezek. 20.8b, 13b, 21b), mention a specific act of Yahweh and the sinful disobedience of the Israelites in response. The first (Ezek. 20.5–8a) speaks of Yahweh choosing Israel, the house of Jacob, and of the promise to bring them out of Egypt to a 'land flowing with milk and honey'. Three times Yahweh swears to Israel, once to make himself known, another to swear 'I am Yahweh' and a third to bring them out of Egypt. The content concerns the primary 'making known' of Yahweh and the promise. But it also contains the command, 'Each one of you cast away the detestable things' (*shiqqutse*) of your eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt' (Ezek. 20.7). Self-revelation, promise and command are followed by the adversive *waw* and the response of the people: they rebelled and refused to listen, worshipping precisely those things forbidden by Yahweh (Ezek. 20.8). The pattern is one of Yahweh's act and command, followed by the disobedience and response of Israel.

This somewhat tedious pattern reverberates throughout the Hebrew Bible. Yahweh or El lays down the law, elects Israel and occasionally performs some mighty deed, the people rebel and punishment looms. It is no accident that this chapter of Ezekiel sets out to re-enact a sequence found in so many other places. Except that now, in the second cycle (Ezek. 20.8b–13a), it becomes clear that Ezekiel has pushed back the disobedience of the first

cycle to a moment in Egypt before the Exodus (Ezek. 20.8b). In the second cycle we find both acts and commands from Yahweh – leading them out of Egypt along with 'statutes' (*khuqqoth*) and 'ordinances' (*mishpatim*) (Ezek. 20.11) – to which are now added the 'sabbaths' in order to make the people holy (Ezek. 20.12). In other words, Yahweh has cranked it up a notch or two with extra rules and the people respond with even more wilful disobedience – they reject statutes, ordinances and sabbaths (Ezek. 20.13)

The third and fourth cycles (Ezek. 20.13b–21a and 21b–26) follow the same pattern, although the people are now locked in the wilderness (Ezek. 20.10, 13, 15, 17, 21, 23) with only a hint of the 'most glorious of all lands' (Ezek. 20.15). The intensification starts to lag, with the statutes, ordinances and sabbaths appearing in a pattern that suggests Yahweh is condemned to repeat himself (Ezek. 20.16, 18, 21, 24), except that now the specific sin of the first cycle is added to the list. These detestable things now become the 'idols of their fathers' (*gilluli 'avotham*, Ezek. 20.24, see vv. 16 and 18). With this addition, vv. 16 and 24 repeat the condemnation of v. 13, that they did not follow Yahweh's statutes and ordinances, profaned the sabbaths, and now worshipped the idols of their fathers.

By this time the pattern starts to break down, for there are no further acts of self-revelation or deliverance – the suggestion of land is cast in terms of a negative promise (Ezek. 20.15) – and Yahweh merely repeats the condemnation ad nauseam. The only positive words, namely, the command to walk in his statutes and observe his ordinances, follow the warnings not to follow the ordinances, statutes and idols of their fathers. The repetition becomes wearying (as does writing 'statutes, ordinances and idols' once again), but by the fourth cycle the text strains to a breaking point, dropping off bits and pieces, losing speed rapidly as it grinds to a halt. The key is in vv. 15 and 23. Both begin with 'Moreover I stretched out my hand to them in the wilderness' only to move from 'that I would not bring them into the land' in v. 15 to the threat of v. 23, 'to scatter them among the nations'. The latter stands in tension with the phrase of sparing in Ezekiel 20.21b–22, which echoes those that appear earlier (Ezek. 20.8b–9, 13b–14). In other words, by v. 23 Yahweh spares them merely to destroy them. However, already in Ezekiel 20.13b–14 Yahweh appears to spare the people not for another act of deliverance as in Ezekiel

20.10 but for a more exquisite punishment – denial of entry into the land – a dangling promise that is drawn away, with pleasure, at the least provocation! By Ezekiel 20.23 there is no longer any promise removed: Yahweh spares the people for the sake of pure punishment.

The twisted and strained logic comes to a complete collapse by vv. 25 and 26.

> Moreover I gave them statutes that were not good (*khuqqim lo' tovim*) and ordinances by which there was no life (*umishpatim lo' yikheyu bahem*); and I defiled them (*wa'atamme' 'otham*) in their gifts by making them offer by fire every first born so that I might horrify them, so that they would know that I am Yahweh.

It is a logic of taking the people's sins to their extreme, but in doing so the text shears off and shatters. The people are trapped: until now they had ordinances and statutes from Yahweh against which they rebelled and for which they would be punished. But now Yahweh has spared them only to spring the theological trap. They can either follow the earlier statutes and ordinances and be condemned for not following the new ones, or they can obey the new ones only to be punished for not obeying the earlier ones. They are damned if they do and damned if they don't. The breathtaking theological leap – that the people so consistently disobey as if they follow an alternative law – collapses the whole structure of what has gone before. Yahweh has them surrounded, so that any leeway they might have had for their own initiative has been snatched away from them.

Had Ernst Bloch not been so enamoured with texts concerning the serpent in Eden, the Exodus, the various heterodox sects of Christianity, he would have seized on a text like this for what he dubbed the 'exodus out of Yahweh'. With this phrase he designates those texts whose dialectical path actually leads away from the conventional Yahweh of the Hebrew Bible, ones that protest against the god of overlords and rulers and in the process move out of Yahweh himself. But Ezekiel 20 also shows the logic of the critical works on Ezekiel I discussed above, even though time and again they refused the conclusions for which they were reaching.

Before I track the directions of these conclusions more closely, I need to consider the remainder of Ezekiel 20. This section of the

chapter falls under the rubric of Yahweh's commandments that are 'not good'. So, the people arrive in the promised land, even though Yahweh said he would not bring them there (Ezek. 20.15), only to follow these new ordinances. In liturgical promiscuity they offer sacrifices and pleasant aromas and drink offerings on 'any high hill or any leafy tree' (Ezek. 20.28). They sacrifice their sons by fire and worship idols (Ezek. 20.31). After vv. 25 and 26 all of these acts are perfectly legitimate, and yet they lead to condemnation at the hands of a Yahweh in severe psychological distress.

The transition from ordinances that the people disobey to their own destruction to those they obey with the same result opens up the final stretch of text. It begins with a mitigated 'promise' – imperative would be a better word – in Ezekiel 20.33–9 only to move into a full-blown enforced restoration in Ezekiel 20.39–44. The breakdown in theological logic, the unbearable paradox of vv. 25 and 26, is necessary for the final verses of the chapter. Two possibilities now present themselves. The first, in Ezekiel 20.33–8, is the punishment of the people, the judgement of vv. 35 and 36. Here we find a contradiction with the earlier condemnation of the whole people as unfaithful and idolatrous: now it is just the 'rebels' who will be purged out and prevented from entering the land of Israel. Exodus and Exile merge into one, but it turns out that only those who have transgressed will be punished, not the whole people. How are we to understand all that has gone before? Is the earlier narrative about these rebels alone, or of the whole people? Why then are they not all punished?

My suggestion is that this contradiction has been set up by the earlier one concerning the statutes that are 'not good'. But this suggestion looks rather flimsy until the final section (Ezek. 20.34–44). The impossible trap of good and bad commandments now closes on the people from both sides. Just as the people had no option but to offer their first-born, following Yahweh's command, they are equally without option regarding their restoration, or, rather, forced repatriation. Yahweh no longer provides statutes that they can obey or disobey. He tells them what they will do: 'On my holy mountain … all the house of Israel, all of them, shall serve me in the land' (Ezek. 20.40). Yahweh will 'accept them', 'require contributions' (Ezek. 20.40), will 'bring you out from the peoples' and 'gather you out' (Ezek. 20.41). The people will 'know that I am Yahweh', 'remember' their ways, 'loathe themselves' (Ezek. 20.42;

see v. 43). All of which will be done according to the curious logic of Yahweh's name.

Apart from the tension between all the house of Israel and the rebels who will be punished by not returning to Israel (Ezek. 20.38), the possibility of such a forced return is set up by Ezekiel 20.25–6. Instead of punishment for sins committed against Yahweh's commandments, we have sins committed by following those commandments, which then leads to the inevitable punishment. In this situation the restoration can no longer take place when the punishment is complete, a just reward for wilful disobedience; instead, it becomes something purely arbitrary, performed by Yahweh at his whim. The people had no option but to sin; now they have no option but to return, worship and serve Yahweh faithfully.

Unexpected utopia

In reply to this story, Bloch's first question would be: what if the people do not want to? Here they are, dragged this way and that with no thought given to their own wishes and desires. Of course, punishment is rarely desired, except in a masochistic state, but a forced return? They have little option in a text like Ezekiel 20. Is this perhaps a sly text, one of those that was written in apparently pious terms, but between the lines another, quietly derogatory and critical, tone emerges. I am not so taken with this aspect of Bloch's work, for it relies too much on historical critical notions of textual layers and editing, concerning which Bloch was fully conversant and somewhat enamoured. Rather, I want to suggest that his dialectic of utopia and the implicit 'atheism', a protest atheism, is more relevant for this text.

Let me begin in reverse order, for Ezekiel 20 brings out the conclusion that the studies I surveyed earlier refused to make. In Ezekiel 20 Yahweh comes through as a complete bastard, one who must have the last word, be totally in control and anticipate any move the people might make. The radical move of vv. 25 and 26 makes Yahweh an impossible God to serve, one who forces people to 'sin', to do precisely what he has forbidden so that the whole notion of sin and rebellion no longer makes any sense. It is, to put it in Bloch's terms, the ultimate desire of the ruling classes, to

co-opt and anticipate any move the people might make so that they are completely subservient. The extreme monotheism implicit in this chapter not only makes Yahweh responsible for good and evil commandments, but also entirely arbitrary. In doing so it shows the impossibility of such monotheism itself, at least in terms of any viable anthropology, of any notion that allows human beings to realize their utopian potential. The forced return of the last verses, where the people must do what Yahweh says – return, serve, worship, accept and know that he is Yahweh – makes a mockery of any sense of worship or serving in response to God. Further, the repeated justification of Yahweh's actions – for his name and to avoid embarrassment among the nations – merely reinforces the breakdown of any viability that such a figure might have. No loving-kindness (*khesed*) here; he is just a bad sport, a sore loser who asserts his superiority. The people of Israel will be his chosen people, entirely for selfish reasons on Yahweh's part, whether they like it or not.

The point I want to make is that in Ezekiel we have not an undesirable representation of God, one among many that falls short of God's true nature. Rather, the text shows the radical impossibility of a figure like this. In other words, by going to this extreme, it leads, as Bloch would argue, to what is later called 'atheism', if we allow the anachronism for a moment. I would prefer the term 'anti-Yahwism', since the hypothesis I want to put forward is that texts like Ezekiel 20 give voice to a protest against the strictures of an ideological system that has Yahweh at its centre. In other words, given that the only way of saying anything politically was in terms of the over-arching cultural dominant of the sacred, a political protest, an ideological critique, can only be put in terms of theological categories. A protest against Yahweh is a protest against those for whom Yahweh is the ideological feature that holds a whole ruling-class ideology together. However, in Ezekiel 20 the possibility of such protest showing up relies on the contradictions of that ideology, contradictions that emerge despite and through the text.

If Ezekiel 20 can be read as an implicit protest, then it may join the other texts that Bloch lines up in his search for the 'Exodus out of Yahweh', out of the god of the oppressors. These include the story of the serpent in Genesis 2–3, Cain and Abel in Genesis 4, Korah's rebellion in Numbers 16, Balaam in Numbers 22–4,

the continual theme of the murmuring of the people, much of the prophetic material and so on. Bloch tends to argue that in the earliest layers of the text can we find this protest against the rulers and their God. I am not sure, however, that this is the best line to take, for it is tied in too much to sources and intentions. I would like to emphasize the deep utopian impulse Bloch felt he had identified in collective and individual human existence. From this perspective, Ezekiel 20 expresses less a conscious protest than a subconscious one. It contains an implicit 'protest atheism' that emerges by pushing the limits of Yahwism itself. In other words, it becomes part of Bloch's argument concerning the Bible in spite of itself, producing an intolerable depiction of Yahweh that becomes a criticism of Yahweh and all of his ruling-class associations.

Is this not where the studies, mostly of Ezekiel 16 and 23, lead? They all point out that Yahweh is a thoroughly despicable character in Ezekiel, yet their own conclusions vary, rejecting this specific patriarchal representation of Yahweh as flawed, deconstructing Yahweh's character so that the text loses its ideological power, seeking more constructive and liberating theologies,[30] or suggesting that recognition of Ezekiel's pathology provides readers with the possibility of healing (so Halperin). Most would like to keep the God of the Bible in some fashion, although not necessarily the one of these texts. Yet, if my argument concerning the implicit rejection of Yahweh in Ezekiel is workable, then what these critics have done is precisely what the text itself does – find that this Yahweh himself is objectionable and unbearable. My suggestion is that the proper conclusion to these studies is one of protest atheism, for they assume that no one in their right mind would believe in such a deity or the ideology of which it is a part.

I have not yet said anything concerning utopia. In light of Bloch's utopian hermeneutics, I want to argue that Ezekiel 20, and possibly the whole book of Ezekiel, can be read as utopian. How can such a misogynist and chauvinistic book with its thoroughly

[30] Bowen attempts such a reading of Ezek. 14.1–11, arguing that the deceptive God of this text may be a liberating figure, for 'she' is one who brings about the collapse of the old order for the sake of a new one. Nancy Bowen, 'Can God Be Trusted? Confronting the Deceptive God', *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (Athalya Brenner (ed.), *The Feminist Companion to the Bible*, vol. 8; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), pp. 354–65.

despicable deity be regarded as utopian? Let me begin with Bloch's observation that even in the depraved and degraded products of culture a utopian glimpse may be found. Here his dialectical analysis swings into consideration, for utopia may only emerge in these situations by means of a thorough suspicion of any ostensible utopian project. It is not so much that the very effort to construct a utopia, even though it may turn out to be thoroughly dystopian, functions as a signal of the utopian imagination, that the effort to imagine another world, however bad it may be, is in itself utopian. No, the argument is more specific: the utopian dimension of a religious text like the Bible lies not in its images, dreams and hopes for a better world, nor even in the projection of such a world into the mythical past of paradise or Eden. It lies in the protest against the god or gods of the ruling class that we find everywhere in the Bible, in other words, in protest atheism itself. Only then, from a theological perspective, does the possibility of utopia emerge.

In this light, I have argued for the implicit atheism of Ezekiel 20 and those studies of Ezekiel 16 and 23, through the extreme portrayal of a deity who gives Israel statutes both good and evil, who forces them to return to the land and serve him and who does so for the 'noble' motives of his own name and reputation among the nations. Yet, this implicit protest against Yahweh is also a utopian moment, a glimpse of a world without such a god to which human beings are subject. It is utopian because it is a protest against the political economic situation that produces such a figure and uses him as the linchpin of a ruling ideology. The rulers are under criticism as much as their God. As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, the notion of atheism is anachronistic, for the possibility of atheism arises only much later, when the sacred is not the over-arching ideological framework of human existence. Under the economic system of the Hebrew Bible, the dominant cultural mode of the sacred means that what we would now categorize as the psychological, social, sexual, gendered and cultural aspects of human life (the categorization is itself a signal of our own cultural dominant of reification) were articulated and understood in terms of the sacred. Thus, what I have described as an implicit atheism is more correctly a protest against this particular god, Yahweh, an anti-Yahwism that seeks an alternative within the cultural dominant of the sacred itself.

Summary

- This chapter draws upon the less familiar work of Ernst Bloch, namely his argument for utopian protest 'atheism' in the Bible.
- His approach includes a dialectical approach to hermeneutics, which focuses on the way liberating and utopian themes in myths may be inseparable from oppressive ones.
- His approach to the Bible may therefore be described as detective work.
- Ezekiel 16 and 23 and their 'pornoprophetics' may be regarded as the first sign of protest atheism, to which some feminist criticisms draw near.
- Ezekiel 20 is a text that gives voice to that protest 'atheism' directly, with its God that forces people to do wrong so that they may be punished.
- The unexpected utopia of this text is that such anti-Yahwism may be seen as a protest against an oppressive system saturated with the sacred.

9

Antonio Negri: Job, or bending transcendence to immanence

Like Ernst Bloch, Antonio Negri has actually written a book on the Bible, his recently published *The Labor of Job*.[1] So this chapter takes a slightly different approach, in which I engage with Negri's own and somewhat unique interpretation of that biblical text. I begin with some background information that led to his study of Job, moving then to identify his interpretative strategies. From there, I focus on the core argument, which turns on the tension between measure and immeasure.

A work of prison and escape

Negri's reading of Job was prompted by his arrest in 1979 for his involvement in the Autonomy Movement, which was supposed to be the political wing of the Red Brigades (*Brigate Rosse*). Accused of being the mastermind and leader of the Red Brigades, Negri languished in prison, unable to gain access to lawyers or any

[1] *The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor* (trans. Matteo Mandarini; Durham: Duke University Press, 2009 [2002]).

clarity as to the charges that were to be laid against him.[2] He was permitted few books, apart from the Bible. So he began to read and then write. As he awaited his trial, he was elected, in 1983, to be a member of parliament for the Radical Party. Although such a position carried with it immunity from prison (he was released), the parliament immediately began to enact legislation that removed his immunity. With a small window of opportunity, he fled to France. Once there, he continued writing on Job, making use of the collection of books in the Le Sauchoir Library of the Dominicans in Paris. He made particular use of the texts written by Vatican II authors to shape his final argument.

Initially the study of Job was not published, for Negri wrote it as a process of self-clarification, a way of dealing with doubt and fear and suffering while in prison. For some reason, Job seemed to enable him to deal with such experiences. The book was, as far as I know, published in Italian, and Spanish and French texts appeared,[3] but for long it remained out of circulation. However, with the so-called religious turn among radical European philosophers in the early years of the new millennium,[4] interest grew in

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[2] He was eventually convicted of the dreadful crime of writing books that members of the Red Brigades read. No evidence of any direct involvement was found, although it was a convenient opportunity for the powers that be to attempt to hobble a charismatic figure on the Left.

[3] Antonio Negri, *Job: La Fuerza del Esclavo* (Barcelona: Ediciones Paidos Iberica, 2003); Antonio Negri, *Job, la force de l'esclave* (Paris: Bayard, 2002).

[4] This 'turn' (the quotation marks are deliberate) was facilitated as much by the vagaries of translation as by a spirit of the times. Here we find a distinct interest in the Apostle Paul. See Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (trans. Ray Brassier; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003 [1997]); Alain Badiou, *Saint-Paul: la fondation de l'universalisme* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997); Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (trans. Patricia Dailey; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005 [2000]); Bernard Sichère, *Le jour est proche: la révolution selon Paul* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2003); Shmuel Trigano, *L'E(xc)lu: Entre Juifs et chrétiens* (Paris: Denoël, 2004); Jean-Michel Rey, *Paul ou les ambiguïtés* (Paris: Editions de l'Olivier, 2008); Stanislas Breton, *A Radical Philosophy of Saint Paul* (trans. Jospeh N. Ballan; New York: Columbia University Press, 2011 [1988]); Ward Blanton and Hent De Vries (eds), *Paul and the Philosophers* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013); Ward Blanton, *A Materialism for the Masses: Saint Paul and the Philosophy of Undying Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). The literature grows exponentially.

Negri's text on Job, enough for a translation to be made some two decades or more after it was written.

At the time Negri wrote his study, he was a little-known radical Italian philosopher, or rather, he was known among the Italian populace as a radical activist, for his face with its curly wild locks was shown often on television while he was in prison. But he was not known as a philosopher, except among the Italian Left and among international Marxists. His relative obscurity was enhanced by the fact that some years earlier he had ceased to write and engaged in extensive activism among Italian factory workers around Venice. Over these seven years and in constant conversation with his comrades, they developed the crucial category of *operaismo*, or workerism. A crucial feature of this development was the argument that resistance is not external or on the peripheries of power, attempting to undermine and hopefully overthrow that power. No, resistance is itself constitutive: power constantly has to adapt, come up with new strategies, attempt new hegemonies, against the creative continuity of resistance. As a philosopher, Negri turned to Spinoza to develop this position, but we also see it in his book on Job, especially in terms of the immeasurable creativity of suffering. This relative obscurity changed when he happened to meet Michael Hardt, who became his creative amanuensis. The result is now well known, with the bestseller *Empire* and the subsequent volumes *Multitude* and *Commonwealth*.[5] Now, of course, many more people became interested in Negri's work, including works – such as Job – that had gained little attention at the time of their initial publication.

Methods of reading

> In general, the biblical texts have always been extremely important for me.[6]

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[5] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2009).

[6] Antonio Negri and Cesare Casarino, *In Praise of the Common: A Conversation on Philosophy and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 168.

Negri is all too aware of the shortcomings of his study of Job: he is not a Bible scholar, had to work with a translation of the book of Job and is conscious that his interpretation may well suffer under the critical gaze of biblical specialists.[7] With this healthy awareness of his own limitations in mind, let me suggest that he develops two methods of reading, one that may be called philosophical exegesis and the other radical homiletics.

Philosophical commentary

To begin with, the commentary on Job is what may be called a philosophical commentary. Negri comes to the text not with the unquestioned assumptions, methods and skills that characterize all too many of your garden variety biblical critics. Is he perhaps a solitary philosopher venturing into biblical analysis? Without a sense of what may be called the 'mega-text' of biblical criticism, does he trip up? Not quite, for there is another patchwork tradition of what may be called philosophical exegesis or commentary. Some texts of the Bible – Genesis 1–11, the letters of Paul, Job – continue to call forth commentary from philosophers and sundry Marxist critics.[8] Negri's text falls in with this group. So he offers a commentary on Job in a way that is comparable with his reading of other philosophers such as Spinoza, Marx or even Descartes.[9]

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[7] This awareness became clear when we were awaiting his response to my commentary, which appeared as an epilogue to *The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor*, pp. 109–28. He also writes (email correspondence) that the 'relationship with the religious interpreters of Job has always left me a bit perplexed; with the Catholics … and why not with the Protestants?' Since then, Negri has become a little more open about his attitudes to religion, which can be both a 'big rip-off in itself' and a 'great instrument of liberation'. Antonio Negri and Raf Valvola Scelsi, *Goodbye Mr. Socialism* (trans. Peter Thomas; New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008), p. 205. See also the interviews in Negri and Casarino, *In Praise of the Common: A Conversation on Philosophy and Politics*; Antonio Negri and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Negri on Negri* (trans. M. B. DeBevoise; New York: Routledge, 2004); Negri and Scelsi, *Goodbye Mr. Socialism*; Antonio Negri and Gabriele Fadini, 'Materialism and Theology: A Conversation', *Rethinking Marxism* 20, 4 (2008), pp. 665–72.

[8] See the previous note.

[9] Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse* (trans. Harry Cleaver, Michael Ryan and Maurizio Viano; Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1991);

Indeed, Job joins the ranks of these philosophers and so may be read in a way that raises profound philosophical questions. However, being part of this tradition does not make matters any easier, for he needs to mediate between two camps, between radical philosophy and biblical criticism.

Let me illustrate this point by considering the structure of the Job book. Negri uses a conventional chapter structure along with a series of 'Notes' irregularly added to the tails of the chapters. These notes undertake an intermittent conversation with a collection of philosophers while the remaining text largely concerns itself with the biblical text. Thus, an exploration of the likenesses and differences between Spinoza and Job appears in Note A, a short and sharp engagement with René Girard's mistaken reading of Job as scapegoat in Note B, a fascinating intense burst on laughter in Note C, the sublime in Note D, negative theology in Note H, pain, community and communication in Wittgenstein in Note I and then Habermas's mistakes concerning modernity in Note J.[10] What is telling here is that while the philosophers appear in the notes, the book of Job is the focus of the main text. Why does he do this?

Negri ensures that the philosophical interlocutors have their place, not dominating the discussion so as to enable Job to become not merely one of the philosophers, but to be the prime philosopher with whom Negri engages. Job is the text on which Negri wishes to work out some crucial philosophical issues. The prime focus is the text and not the thoughts of other philosophers. In this way, Negri avoids the problem that bedevils many of the current efforts to engage philosophers and biblical critics on the letters of Paul. Many biblical scholars, locked into their own history and set of assumed questions, tend all too quickly to dismiss the engagements of Badiou, Agamben, Žižek, Rey or Breton. On their side, these philosophers find the questions that interest biblical scholars

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Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics* (trans. Michael Hardt; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Antonio Negri, *Subversive Spinoza: (Un)contemporary Variations* (trans. Timothy S. Murphy et al.; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Antonio Negri, *The Political Descartes: Reason, Ideology and the Bourgeois Project* (trans. Matteo Mandarini and Alberto Toscano; London: Verso, 2006).

[10] Note E deals with the resurrection of the flesh, Note F with Marx and Note G with negative theology.

– authorship, textual provenance, context in the ancient world – do not connect with their own interest in Paul as a political thinker. What we really have is a dislocation of two traditions of commentary with their different histories, rhythms and mega-texts. Negri avoids such a dislocation.[11]

Negri's careful attention to the text of Job – manifested in quoting large sections and thereby not assuming a hidden and sacred status for that text – leads him into a problem at the heart of biblical criticism. I mean here the tension between 'historical criticism' and literary or 'postmodern' approaches to the Bible. In Negri's discussion they appear as two options: either the text is a fragmented collection gathered over time, or it has a literary integrity that gives unity to a disparate piece. Even with the limited resources that were at his disposal when writing *The Labor of Job*, Negri carefully reads both text and biblical commentators. In this way, he replicates this tension between historical criticism and literary approaches. The reader finds careful representation of historical-critical assumptions concerning the structure and history of the text now known as Job. The prose prologue and epilogue (Chapters 1–2; 42.7–17) become the most ancient layer of the text, after which we find the poem of Job's complaint, the engagement with the three lawyers Eliphaz, Zophar and Bildad, the subsequent additions of the mythical cosmogony and the monsters Leviathan and Behemoth (all of which we find in the famous voice from the whirlwind in Chapters 38–41), then the insertion of Elihu's speeches, and finally the last added layer, the 'Hymn to Wisdom' in Job 28.[12]

We might expect that such an approach would produce an inevitable fragmentation, especially if it is coupled with the fateful theological assumption common to many biblical critics that the earliest is the most authentic. Fragmentation is of course one of the well-known outcomes of historical critical analysis, along with the interminable and irresolvable debates concerning how to break up the text into its many layers. Without any external evidence

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[11] See further Roland Boer, *Criticism of Religion: On Marxism and Theology II* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 121–54.

[12] Negri, *The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor*, pp. 2–3. Negri even provides the obligatory 'dates' that stretch from an unspeakably ancient and un-datable basis through to the third or second century BCE.

as to how Job might have come together or when it was written, historical critics have notoriously claimed a 'scientific' status for their work.

Negri deftly sidesteps the quagmire of such minute and ultimately futile arguments. In fact, when I first read his text, I thought he was opting for a poetic-literary coherence characteristic of the text of Job common in literary readings. Here some of the commentators he deploys seem to assist such an approach.[13] Even so, although Negri initially seemed to me to be opting for a poetic-literary position of integrity and coherence, he actually develops an argument for *philosophical* coherence. For example, in relation to Elihu's speeches (fourth layer of the text), he writes:

> In whatever manner things stand, I am interested in studying these discourses for what is said in them, for the further, strong variant that they insert in the *philosophical architecture* of the book of Job. These discourses are in fact far from being simply an internal articulation of the text; *they represent rather a new critical position*.[14]

I have emphasized the crucial phrases in this quotation for an obvious reason, but Negri makes a similar move for philosophical integrity when he engages with the figures of Leviathan and Behemoth and related cosmogonic content (the supposed third layer): 'There should be little doubt about where I place myself on the question of the interpretations of these passages: where we are led necessarily by philology we are also led by *strictly poetic and philosophical considerations*.'[15] It should be quite clear by now that Negri develops an argument for philosophical integrity. Each new insertion or each new layer on the historical-critical reconstruction of the text actually becomes an effort to deal with the problems that have arisen from the previous insertion or layer. Negri's approach may be summed up as absorbing the historical

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[13] Norman Habel, *The Book of Job* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Samuel Terrien, *Job, Commentaire de l'Ancien Testament* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1963); Samuel Terrien, *Job, Poet of Existence* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004).

[14] Negri, *The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor*, p. 63.

[15] Negri, *The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor*, p. 52.

fragmentation and layering of the text, drawing upon the literary and the theological arguments for coherence and then developing his own argument for philosophical integrity. Job is in other words a fully fledged philosophical text.

Left-wing homiletics

Coupled with Negri's philosophical commentary is what may be called a radical or left-wing homiletics. As those who have been trained in the delicate art of homiletics know, it involves the fine skill of relating a biblical text with the experiences of everyday life. It combines skill in languages, textual exegesis, with writing in a way an audience understands and the skill of an orator. Homiletics may be seen as dialectics in its own way, perpetually moving between two items that both engage with one another and yet resist – the intricacies of textual analysis and a keen eye for the nature of contemporary life. Those with a more theological tendency will of course seek the way 'God' or the 'Word' speaks to us today, but this assumption is by no means necessary for the dialectical art of homiletics.

Negri's homiletics is radical for two reasons, one political, resting on Marx, and the other textual, reading Job as a pre-eminent document for our time. Job both describes our time and offers a way through the impasse of Left action. Throughout the study of Job we find observations that relate Job intimately with our own day. For instance, Job addresses directly the problem of a 'theodicy of capital'. Neither bourgeois theory nor proletarian practice is able to provide such a theodicy, so the situation becomes dangerously violent and oppressive:

> Capital is truly Behemoth and Leviathan, Hiroshima and Auschwitz. And here we are on the other side, where the proletariat is able to directly construct value thanks to the accretion of pain that it has experienced.[16]

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[16] Negri, *The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor*, pp. 75–6. For a different reading of Behemoth and Leviathan as monsters outside the order of being and therefore a location of resistance, see Negri and Casarino, *In Praise of the Common: A Conversation on Philosophy and Politics*, p. 195.

Other examples may be added,[17] but Negri's radical homiletics comes to the fore with statements like this:

> The *Book of Job* is *the parabola of modernity*, of the forever unfinished dialectic of world and innovation, being and relation, which characterizes it. And the problem of the *Book of Job* is that of modernity – of the alternative between the totalization of the domination of science and technology over the world, and the liberation of new subjectivity.[18]

What does it mean for Job to be the parabola of modernity? It means this biblical text speaks of the major issues of our times, such as ethics, pain, labour, value, power, subjects, collectives, time, even ontology and metaphysics. For Negri, Job is a model for dealing with today, with the trials and tribulations of the struggle of the multitude and thereby of the Left. Does Negri really need Job? He asks that question himself, but the answer is obvious. Job aided him in dealing with the dreadful defeat of Western radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s. With its challenge to Power and God, with the massive question of 'Why?', the book of Job is in one respect a natural place to seek answers and new questions. But then Negri could have chosen any other great text or thinker to explore the same problems. Or, in terms of biblical interpretation, it is the old problem of exegesis versus eisegesis, reading (literally 'leading') out of a text over against reading 'into' a text. Does not Negri engage in a heavy bout of eisegesis here? Is all this really in Job? Yet biblical interpretation is neither one nor the other: eisegesis and exegesis are inseparable; the heuristic framework with which one begins reading invariably wobbles and changes shape in the face of the text's own words and sentences. That is, what we bring in is altered, often drastically, by what comes out.

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[17] These include the retributive justice championed by Job's three friends, which is also found in the great ages of history, from the Greeks, through Christianity and capitalism and even socialism; Job's modern 'cosmogonic materialism' that resists a position like Bildad's; the overwhelming love championed by Bildad and the Church alike, and rubbished by Job and then Negri in turn. Negri, *The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor*, pp. 36, 39, 48, 63–78.

[18] Negri, *The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor*, p. 103.

Measure and immeasure

So we have philosophical commentary and radical homiletics, but what do they find in Job? I suggest that the fulcrum of Negri's interpretation is the tension between measure (*misura*) and immeasure (*dismisura*). For Negri (im)measure is the thread that links value, labour, pain, ontology, time, power, evil, theodicy, creation and cosmogony. The core tension is complex, for it has both positive and negative registers for each term. Negri searches for a way beyond the negative senses of measure and immeasure – as oppressive order and unending evil – to find more positive senses.

This opposition has two main functions in Negri's philosophical hermeneutics. First, it realigns some old philosophical distinctions, particularly between eternity and contingency, and between universal and particular. Second, it connects those philosophical problems with a core feature of the book of Job, namely, the mythical tension between chaos and order, a tension that also has significant political ramifications. Indeed, measure and immeasure may be seen as Negri's reconfiguration of those mythical terms. In what follows, I explore precisely this feature of his interpretation, dealing first with the various twists and turns involved in the relation between measure and immeasure, and then asking how that relation affects the tension between chaos and order. In a nutshell, Negri wishes to overcome the negative dimensions of measure and immeasure by means of the theological narrative 'of an immensely powerful, creative ontology that emerges from chaos'.[19] That is, Job's gradual gaining of power in his struggle with God involves a return to the chaos that precedes creation and then a re-creation of the world from the ground up. Let us see how Negri's reading progresses.

Order: Negative measure

To begin with, Negri reads Job as dismissing all forms of measure and championing immeasure. Yet, this is only the first step. Although Negri wishes to dispense with a negative, retributive

[19] Negri, *The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor*, p. 73.

measure in favour of a creative immeasure, that chaotic moment is only a transition to a new, positive form of measure. In other words, by the time Negri comes to the close of his commentary, the assessment of measure and immeasure shifts: initially, measure is negative and immeasure positive, but when we encounter a negative immeasure, a new, creative measure begins to appear.

The initial encounter with measure is quite negative, influencing the crucial categories of good and evil, justice, ethics, labour, value and time. Its negativity shows up in terms of retribution, a position espoused by Job's sometime legal 'friends', Eliphaz and Zophar. The well-known logic of retribution simply asserts that if one performs an evil act one will be punished for it; so also with a good act. Balance is the key: evil at one moment will find an equal measure (now as retribution) at another moment; so also will good eventually produce a balance of good as reward. Therefore, if Job is suffering, the cause of Job's suffering is an evil act he must have performed, even if he is not aware of what he has done. That is, evil and good can be measured in neat quantities.[20] This equation may be seen as a pseudo-form of cause and effect. If we can see an effect – suffering – it must have an earlier cause. This means that Job's protestations of innocence are empty and false. A similar equation applies to justice, which becomes a simple formula that matches the correct measure of reward or punishment with the act in question. Ethics too falls under this logic of retribution, for it is a calculation of the balance of good and evil so that we may gain vital advice as to how we should live our lives. Today we can add labour and time: our economic system relies on the ability to calculate how much labour is spent on a job, how wages are to be calculated in order to ensure profit margins and yet keep workers alive. Simple, is it not? Even the eternal problem of theodicy ceases to be a problem at all, for it is merely a question of calculated and quantifiable measure. No longer is there undeserved suffering that questions God's own goodness, for that suffering must have a prior cause in a concealed evil act performed by the one suffering. Does

[20] Although Elihu, the fourth interlocutor, is not part of the original circle of three, his argument for transcendent providence and Job's pride is for Negri the last possible moment of rationalization. Negri, *The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor*, pp. 107–8.

not the operation of retributive measure seem so commonsense, working its way into the smallest of everyday acts? We might call it the *lex talionis* of daily life.

How does Job respond to this well-nigh universal pattern of retribution or payback? The character in the book categorically dismisses any form of what Negri calls measure. In response to Job's rejection, Bildad (the third 'friend') attempts to compensate for the breakdown of measure by advocating an extra-transcendent God. Negri calls this the 'mystical deception' and 'over-determination', for it produces a God who both guarantees and entices one to goodness. The only appropriate response to such a God is devotion, adoration and surrender. For Negri, this is nothing less than a grovelling apology for authoritarian and dictatorial power. Here he simply follows Job, who has no time for such an over-charged deity. Both of Job's refusals – of a system of measured retribution and of awed surrender to God – leave his dialogue partners nonplussed: 'When Job decisively rejects the transcendent motif as well, his lawyers – who are on the brink of becoming his ideological enemies – accuse him of titanic *hybris*.'[21]

Thus far I have run through all but two of the categories Negri gathers under measure – good and evil, justice, ethics and labour. Two items remain, those of time and value. As for time, Job provides an energetic counter to the idea that time is empty, static and measured. This sense of time came into its own only with Neo-Platonic thought, when time became abstract, a form of being, transcendent and dominating – precisely when Christianity became the dominant ideological force of empire. By contrast (and to anticipate the more positive reading proposed by Negri), in Job time is concrete, lived, painful, common, immanent and even filled with theophany; it is a stark contrast with abstract and dominating time. In particular, the time of Job is characterized by rhythm, movement and event (what Negri calls time–movement) – in sum, it is ontological time. This time is both a being towards death (Negri quotes Job 7.4, 6–8 and 9.25–6) and a fullness and state of happiness (29.2–6). As content and part of existence, this time in Job is the point of contact between lived, concrete time and the linear movement of divine epiphany – here earth and heaven touch.

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[21] Negri, *The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor*, p. 38.

What of value? At one level, Negri seeks another theory of value, especially since he is less than keen on the Marxist labour theory of value. We should no longer measure labour power (x hours in the working day), surplus value (x+ hours and greater efficiency within those hours, that is, absolute and relative surplus value), or indeed exchange and use values. In Negri 's larger project, he seeks a new theory of value that operates without measure, and Job is one of the philosophers upon whom he draws. Job's real use, however, is not only at the economic level, but also at another level entirely, that of ethics.

Chaos: From negative to positive immeasure

According to the ethical calculus of retribution, labour is entirely evil. Why? Labour is subject to immeasurable exploitation. Now immeasure comes into play, albeit with a negative sense. If measure itself is problematic, immeasure is even more so. Now Negri's reading begins to shift, discovering new dimensions to the opposition of measure and immeasure. Let us focus on immeasure to trace that shift. This initial impression is that Negri reads immeasure positively and measure negatively. In mythical terms, chaos is good and order evil. Yet, when Negri observes that exploitation is immeasurable, we find ourselves with a negative sense of immeasure. Indeed, evil is itself immeasurable,[22] so much so that the careful measuring of goodness, justice, ethics, labour, time and value begins to pale into insignificance.

A well-worn path that so many have followed in dealing with immeasurable evil is to designate it as chaos and then to seek to establish order as a way of limiting such evil. Here we find social sanctions, state, law and repressive institutions such as the police and the army. They keep the rebellious elements, the 'criminals' and 'terrorists' and 'rabble' off the streets. Yet, Negri is hardly interested in that path, for he suffered too much at the hands of the forces of order. Instead, he focuses on the immeasurable nature of pain and suffering – the central topic of Job – and argues that the only way to overcome the immensity of evil is through the

[22] Negri, *The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor*, pp. 8–9.

immeasurability of pain. Only when we have descended into the depths of immeasurable, undeserved and guiltless pain are we able to get anywhere at all. From the midst of this undeserved suffering power first emerges, a power that is creative. In short, one immeasurable responds to and is greater than another; endless suffering and pain overcomes immeasurable evil and exploitation.

By this time immeasure has gained a new sense, for the immeasurableness of evil now finds itself face to face with the immeasurably creative power of labour. But where do we find God in this opposition? God signifies all that is oppressive (compare the discussion of Ernst Bloch). Even though the book of Job turns on a struggle between God and man, it is a very unequal struggle. God is far too powerful, that is, immeasurable, imbalanced, disproportionate.[23] As judge and an adversary who laughs sarcastically at an increasing rebellious Job, God becomes a cruel oppressor: '*God is the seal of the clearest, fiercest, deepest of social injustices* (Chapter 24 screams forth human anger and desperation in this regard – from within the darkness, the misery and the most terrible unhappiness).'[24] This is a God of immeasurable evil, and certainly not the God of the Scholastic theologians for whom God was a measured and ordered being with fixed characteristics.[25]

Order: Positive measure

Is there any answer to such a horrible God? Negri finds many answers in the book of Job, especially immeasurable pain, which brings with it power, creation, love, labour, democracy,[26] community, lived and common time and even value. To sum up all these responses to immeasurable evil, we may say that the value of labour may be found in democratic pain and suffering which produces the power of creative labour. This is what it really means to live, the proper meaning of ontology. Thus, it not merely immeasure that has value over against measure, but instead two

[23] Negri, *The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor*, pp. 28–9.
[24] Negri, *The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor*, p. 43.
[25] Negri and Dufourmantelle, *Negri on Negri*, p. 80.
[26] Pain is democratic in contrast to fear which is dictatorial.

types of immeasure, the one evil, oppressive and divine and the other chaotic, creative, powerful and good. Before we know it, measure has been revalued. Not restricted to the dreadful patterns of payback, in which reward and punishment are appropriate to the initial act, measure has been dismantled and reshaped for a new task. This powerful and creative ontology that emerges from chaos is comparable to the chaotic immeasure that precedes creation so that the world may be recreated from the beginning. In other words, through the two types of immeasure, one evil and oppressive and the other creative and powerful, a new measure emerges, the creation of a very different and just order.

We may summarize the shifts as follows:

negative measure -> negative immeasure
negative immeasure -> positive immeasure
positive immeasure -> positive measure

If a retributive system of carefully measured patterns of labour, time and value was bad enough, then immeasurable labour and exploitation are far worse. But in the midst of this untold pain and suffering, a new creative power emerges, one that produces a thoroughly new measure, a new order that has nothing to do with the old.

The question to be asked at this point is whether Negri has merely appropriated an age-old and biblical pattern of order-> chaos->order. Initially, of course, the world is ordered and thereby created out of chaos, whether the destruction of the chaotic, older gods in the Mesopotamian creation myth, *Enuma Elish*, or the formless and void state of the 'deep', the *tehom*, in the account of Genesis 1. In response to such chaos, creation involves victory over chaos (variously a monster, the sea, a serpent, an older opponent from an earlier generation of the gods), the demarcation of heaven and earth, planets in their paths, seasons at the right time, and the careful ordering of created life, usually in some form of hierarchy that places humans at the top or, as is more often the case, subordinates human beings to the gods. In other narratives we have the full sequence of order->chaos->order, as in the Flood narrative of Genesis 6–9. Here the initial creation (measure) has turned out to be flawed, characterized by extraordinary evil and exploitation. In order to begin again, God makes use of a beneficial chaos (the

flood) to wipe out the old and begin again with a new, created order. Or, in Negri's words, when 'measure fades into the disorder of the universe and evil is reflected in chaos, in the immeasurable', we need 'the collective creation of a new world' that 'is able to reconstitute a world of values'.[27]

One feature of this cosmological chaos is worth emphasizing, for we too miss it, camouflaged as it is behind the screen of natural chaos: it is also, if not primarily, a political chaos. Once again Negri unwittingly brings the connection to the fore,[28] although now in his opposition between eugenics and the monster, the one a favoured theme from the Greeks onwards (meaning to be well-born, good and beautiful) and the other a marker of what resists. In the creation myths, the monster is of course the one that must be overcome through the creation of order. These stories of creation are usually depicted as cosmogonic (creation of the natural world), theogonic (creation of the gods) and anthropogonic (human beings come into the picture). Yet this threefold distinction is far too limited, for they are also what should be called poligonic.[29] They deal with the origins of, and thereby provide ideological justification for, the current political and social order. For instance, the Mesopotamian myth *Enuma Elish* is keen to point out that the Babylonian king is a direct descendent of Marduk, the warrior and creator god, and the myth spends a good deal of time with the ordering of society, the construction of Babylon and the establishment of the state. Similarly, the creation story in the Bible does not end with the seven days of Genesis 1 or indeed the alternative story of Genesis 2 with its more earthy narrative of the garden. It runs all the way through the stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs (Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah and Rachel, and then the 12 sons and one daughter, Dinah), the migration to Egypt, Moses and the Exodus, wilderness wandering and formation of a state in waiting, and then ends with the conquest of the promised land. In other words, it is primarily a political myth of creation. So

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[27] Negri, *The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor*, pp. 49, 14.

[28] Negri and Casarino, *In Praise of the Common: A Conversation on Philosophy and Politics*, pp. 193–218.

[29] See further Roland Boer, *Political Myth: On the Use and Abuse of Biblical Themes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

if created order means political order, then the chaos against which that order continually struggles is as much political as it is natural. Primeval abyss and catastrophic flood are inseparable from disobedience regarding the tree of good and evil in the garden, from murmuring and insurrection in the wilderness, from the perpetual challenges to the divinely given power of Moses and so on.

Is Negri merely reiterating this ancient political pattern, in which order is re-established after chaos? Initially it may seem so, except for one crucial difference: all these stories tell of a ruling class, usually embodied in a petty despot, asserting its version of order over the unruly mob of chaos. Negri would be the last one to argue for such a pattern; nor would the book of Job in Negri's reading. Recall that it is Job who finds a new form of measure or order out of immeasurable pain. For Negri, Job stands for the unnamed masses, the multitude.[30]

Conclusion: Bending transcendence to immanence

One feature of Negri's interpretation of Job highlights as no other this very focus. He offers a brilliant and original reading of the infamous 'Voice from the Whirlwind' in Job 38–41. 'Then Yahweh answered Job out of the whirlwind' (Job 31.8), it begins, and from there we are taken on a grand tour of the created universe. The challenge to Job is clear: what is your suffering compared to all *this*?

In contrast to many opinions on this text (a useful reminder of our puny status before such powers and wonders; or the need for thanks and awe; or a useless effort at divine boasting), Negri offers a unique reading. The fact that God actually appears is the sign of Job's victory.[31] Up to this moment, God has remained conspicuously

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[30] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*.

[31] Or, as Negri observes elsewhere, 'Job is really the theory of the vision of the inside of desire – a desire that contains its object: my God, I have seen you, therefore I possess you'. Negri and Dufourmantelle, *Negri on Negri*, p. 157. In this light, it matters little that Yahweh repeats many of the opinions of Elihu (Job 32–7). The crucial issue is that God is forced to speak.

silent, not even bothering to answer Job's increasingly bitter challenges. In God's place, we find the various arguments, such as retribution (Eliphaz and Zophar), mystical over-determination (Bildad) and transcendent providence (Elihu), each of which Job rejects. Finally, Job stings God enough so that the latter makes an appearance and actually responds to the accusation. At the moment God – the representative of all those nameless oppressors – speaks, Job triumphs. The key verse is Job 42.5: 'I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee.' Job has seen God, an event that normally leads to instantaneous death or at least mental derangement. Even Moses was allowed only a glimpse of the divine backside. Job has seen God, *and* he is not bowed. As Negri puts it:

> I have seen God, thus God *is* torn from the absolute transcendence that constitutes the idea of Him. God justifies himself, thus God is dead. I have seen God, hence Job can speak of Him, and he – Job – can in turn participate in divinity, in the function of redemption that man constructs within life – the instrument of the death of God that is human constitution and the creation of the world. The materialist reading of the vision of God has, thus, the capacity to capture the creative moment of this ontological immersion of man – whether it be Adam or Job – in the relationship with the divine; and, thus, of linking ontologically – not morally, not merely intellectually – the human powers [*potenze*] to those divine, i.e., the singular in the universal.[32]

This leaves open the distinct possibility that the new measure, the new order created out of immense pain, suffering and labour, will be qualitatively different from the order imposed by the dictators. Job reaches up to God and sees him, he calls God to account and forces him to justify himself. Or, as Negri puts it elsewhere, this is the moment when 'transcendence is bent into immanence'.[33]

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[32] Negri, *The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor*, pp. 96–7. See also Negri's point that this reaching up and bringing God down to earth is like the Spinozist recreation of God each day through what one does. Negri and Dufourmantelle, *Negri on Negri*, pp. 146–7.

[33] Negri and Fadini, 'Materialism and Theology: A Conversation', p. 667.

Summary

- This chapter focuses on the study of the book of Job by the Italian Marxist, Antonio Negri.
- Negri's insightful approach may be described as philosophical commentary and left-wing hermeneutics.
- The key tension in Job is between immeasure and measure, or chaos and order.
- Measure is initially negative, only to be outdone by negative immeasure (untold pain and suffering).
- Out of this negative immeasure emerges a positive immeasure, of creative labour.
- This leads to a new and different measure, or order, which is not established by the ruling classes but by those who have been oppressed.
- Job gives voice to this new possibility by succeeding in getting God to speak, and so bending transcendence to immanence.

10

Fredric Jameson: The contradictions of form in the Psalms

Jameson's critical programme – 'The Poetics of Social Forms' – has sought to engage with utopianism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, linguistics, Russian formalism, psychoanalysis, film theory, architecture, science fiction and cultural studies. His work is characterized by a commitment to the central questions of Marxism while arguing that they constitute problems and areas of debate rather than fixed ideas. Following in the footsteps of Adorno and Lukács, among others, Jameson is also a resolutely dialectical thinker, seeking perpetually to connect what is usually divided into superstructure and base (see the Introduction).

My focus is on his approach to the tension between form and content, particularly the way form relates dialectically to politics, society and history. The starting point for this type of analysis is formal contradiction, which then opens the door to questions of content and history. In doing so, he operates as much by means of sharp insight and intuition as by any specific method, although he does work within the Hegelian-Marxist tradition. My concern with form relates to the stretch of Hebrew text I want to discuss, the Psalms. In particular, I am interested in the interaction between the study of Psalms and the text of Psalms. Thus, the critical study of Psalms tends to operate in terms of content – historical location and usage, theological or devotional themes – and form

– especially the form criticism that still lays the groundwork for such study. Yet, the text seems burdened with an earlier history of interpretation and organization, such as the five books, or as the psalms of David, Asaph, Solomon and so on, or by means of the 'musical' superscriptions, or by locating individual Psalms in the life of David. The tension between form and content, I argue, relies on some more fundamental contradictions within the Psalms themselves, and I make use of Jameson's adaptation of Greimas's semiotic square to sort out the contradictions, both in the Psalms and in their interpretation.

Imaginary resolution

For Jameson, the analysis of form may operate in a number of ways, which may be designated as the imaginary resolution of real social contradictions and as the ideology of form. As for imaginary resolution, it is part of a heuristic framework within which Jameson works. However, he never uses that framework as a template, preferring to allow the particular methods of analysis to emerge from the specific text in question. This requires, as I mentioned a moment ago, an intuitive hunch that is then structured into a rigorous analysis. As for that heuristic framework itself, Jameson speaks of three levels of interpretation.[1] The first level begins with the individual text in question, focusing on formal contradictions that open out into ideology and the specific historical questions that are recognizable in terms of the biological individual – everyday events, the rise and fall of political regimes, major historical moments and so on. The second goes wider, situating the text as one player among a range of others in a contested ideological field. With the ideological focus, class conflict becomes important. The third, which operates with the widest notion of modes of production, seeks traces or figures of such modes in the text being interpreted. Significantly, Jameson's method connects the relation between base and superstructure (synchrony) with the history of modes of production (diachrony).

[1] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 1–88.

In Jameson's critical practice, not all levels of the analysis work at the same time: often one will be sufficient, or he will explore a new area that does not necessarily fall within the schema.

How does this relate to imaginary resolution? The term relies on Althusser's definition of ideology, which I discussed in detail in the first chapter: ideology is the representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real social conditions of existence. Jameson takes this a step further and argues that literary texts and cultural products more generally may be understood as imaginary resolutions of social and historical contradictions. Ultimately, these attempted resolutions are bound to fail, for one cannot resolve economic and social problems by means of thought. Yet that failure shows up in the formal structure of the text in question. Even though the text may seem to offer a resolution of the contradiction, it reveals that failure not so much in content as in form – through contradictions and tensions. With this in mind, literary analysis is able to reverse the process: we can focus on form, for the failure of form reveals traces of the social and economic contradictions the text tries to overcome. Jameson's great model is Lévi-Strauss's structuralist analysis of Caduveo (a Brazilian tribe) face painting in *Tristes Tropiques*,[2] where Lévi-Strauss argues that the tension between the symmetrical patterns of the face and the different axis of the facial art itself is a formal effort to resolve the contradictions between the social hierarchy of Caduveo society and the social relations produced by such a hierarchy. The analogy with literary texts is that they, like other cultural products, may be described as 'symbolic acts', as efforts to resolve on a formal and then ideological level the contradictions to which they function as a response.

Given that the resolution takes place in formal terms, textual analysis must focus, at least at its first moment, on formal analysis in order to uncover the contradictions that leave their traces in the form of the text. But what does Jameson mean by form? In his myriad texts, where definition appears more as an assumption that then alters in the process of interpretation, form may include the

[2] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman; London: Pan, 1989), pp. 229–56; Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, pp. 77–80.

particular structure of a literary product, such as its organization into various stages or sequences (for instance, Thomas More's *Utopia*) or the arrangement of poetry; the tensions of genre that constitute genre itself; the materiality of cultural products such as film and television; and most consistently in language itself. On this last feature, he often begins an interpretation with a discussion of 'sentence production', the syntactical and grammatical features of a particular language, the use of certain terms over against others and the distinct practice of style.[3]

Ideology of form

What of the ideology of form? A key feature of Jameson's formal analysis is contradiction, for he seeks the tensions and contradictions in form as a signal of the contradictions of ideology and ultimately of the social and economic conditions to which the text is a response. In fact, the identification of a contradiction means that the interpretation is going somewhere: a critic has not worked hard enough until contradiction emerges. Time and again Jameson's various critical gestures work towards a contradiction or series of contradictions, which then become the moment for moving onto another level of analysis.

In part, Jameson's fascination with formal contradiction is indebted to the Russian formalists' notion of defamiliarization or Brecht's estrangement effect. The formalists argued for an inversion of the relationship between form and content, the latter becoming the mere means of enabling the former. For instance, the details of plot and character have the primary purpose of realizing the form of the novel; or the content of a sermon is actually secondary, for its function is to create the form of the sermon itself. In the case of Brecht, this involved a whole series of strategies – such as stage directions included in the performance of a play or the absolutely deadpan delivery of lines – in order to jolt the audience into a new way of perceiving the world, a political act that sought to break the

[3] The concern with sentence production also reflects Jameson's own work with languages, for he has been variously professor of French and Romance languages. His German is also extremely good.

stranglehold of unquestioned assumptions about the way the world is. Too often we neglect the structures or coordinates of existence, thereby being unable to change them.

Nonetheless, Jameson is not satisfied with the identification of contradictions *per se*. Rather, such contradictions are unstable, constantly shifting and criss-crossed with other contradictions, generating further contradictions with which texts work, all of which constitute a step towards seeking the real social contradictions that texts seek to resolve. A favoured strategy of Jameson is the use of Greimas's semiotic square (itself a development from Aristotle's logical square) in order to trace the further implications of the initial contradiction. Time and again the square appears in his work, although its use goes well beyond Greimas. For Jameson, the square with its relations of contradiction and contrariety enables him to map out at least three factors: the ideological structure of a text; the possibilities of such an ideological structure and its limits; the closing down of other ideological possibilities. It is precisely these excluded items that then allow him to move on to another level, where the contradiction then becomes one between what is included and excluded (usually the historical, political economic features to which a text is responding).

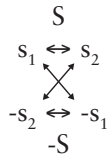
I reiterate that no set formula appears for how one may engage in formal analysis, especially via the semiotic square. Indeed, such analysis may lead an interpreter in different directions. At times, Jameson seeks specific historical moments to which a text's form can be connected. At others, it will be a move to questions of ideology and social class, ideology understood here as the conflicting types of class-consciousness, between those who own the means of production and those who do not. Often he moves to the broader category of mode of production, identifying the formal production as a specific feature of the complex and contradictory patterns of the culture and ideology within a mode of production. Nearly all his work deals with literary and cultural products from the various permutations of capitalism, and so any interpretation of a pre-capitalist text like the Bible requires a consideration of the very different mode(s) of production that are in operation.

In regard to the Psalms, I am interested in the move from form to ideology, which constitutes a shift to a content that is always implicit in any formal analysis. In that shift, formal contradictions in a text become ideological antinomies, which may be defined as

scandals of thought or conceptual paradoxes that resists resolution by means of thought itself. But that is to invert the relationship: a formally contradictory text functions as an effort to resolve an impossible antinomy at the level of ideology. Yet the ideological antinomy is itself the result of tensions in the base, in political economics, which any system attempts to resolve in order to avoid the possibility of chaos and collapse.

The semiotic square

In the process of moving from form to ideology, Jameson makes use time and again of Greimas's semiotic square. The most complete statement of how the 'interested outsider can navigate this conceptuality and occasionally beach and camp with profit and stimulation within it'[4] may be found in Jameson's 'Foreword' to the English translation of a number of key essays by Greimas. The square comes into its own with the dialectical relation between narrative and cognition. These comprise the two incompatible but dialectical forms of ideology, whose relationship the semiotic square then mediates. Thus, a narrative takes the shape of cognitive or ideological combinations, while a cognitive text is rewritten as a narrative struggle between ideas and concepts. The great advantage of the square is that it provides a visible and spatial way of representing the contradiction between narration and cognition. The mapping onto the square begins with the initial term, s_1, and then its contradiction, s_2. So far, so good, but now we find a further set of oppositions, as negatives of the first two, $-s_1$ and $-s_2$.



[4] Fredric Jameson, 'Foreword', *On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory* (A. J. Greimas (ed.); Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. vi–xxxii (vi).

Two further signs (compound terms) appear, S being the complex term in which the initial opposition is overcome, and -S being the location, as neutral term, of negation and privation. Along the sides run the lateral or deictic axes, in which the terms of s_1 and $-s_2$, and then s_2 and $-s_1$ relate to one another. By now we have at least eight possible terms, each engaged in multiple and criss-crossing layers of contradiction. While this may seem somewhat mechanical and dry in the way I have presented it, the square provides a rich and sophisticated way of dealing with the ideological tensions of a text. It enables one to map those tensions out and then track the way they relate to one another. Of course, the test is in my interpretation of Psalms, but I do want to emphasize one point from Jameson: the fourth term, at the lower left-hand corner of the diagram, is the one that requires most work. One needs patience and the filling of many pages with scribbling before the square works itself out.

Jameson regularly used the square after its first appearance in *The Prison-House of Language*,[5] but I should point out that the square is not always appropriate for every text and that the way one uses it is determined by the text under analysis. Crucially, the purpose of the square is two-fold. First, it maps all of the available ideological positions with a text (or any cultural product). Second, it enables one to see what is excluded in that system. Those excluded items them become the key to relating the ideological

[5] Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 162–8. As a representative sample of the various uses of the square after its first appearance, I would include: mechanisms of narrative closure and the character systems of a particular story; ideological systems in a novel corpus such as that of Conrad; the libidinal apparatus of Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr*; a philosopher's aesthetic framework; the generation of Utopian narrative by means of the neutral term; and the spatial systems in Hitchcock's *North by Northwest*. See, in order of reference, Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005), pp. 349–62; Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, pp. 206–80; Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 99; Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, the Persistence of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 151–4; Fredric Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory* (London: Verso, 2009 [1988]), pp. 386–414; Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1992).

contradictions in question to their socio-economic context. My own specific use of Jameson's work for interpreting the Psalms is to focus on the question of form – precisely because that has been the major aspect of Psalms study – in order to locate the formal contradiction. Then I resort to my own version of the semiotic square in order to explore the ideological limits and exclusions that operate within the Psalms and scholarship concerning them.

The problem of the Psalms

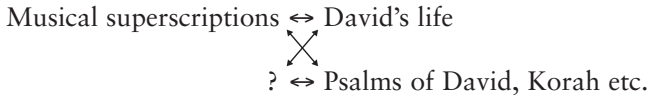
As I suggested earlier, the study of the Psalms falls within two broad categories: the study of their devotional, historical or thematic content, and the study of form. Indeed, form criticism, which initially persuaded biblical studies[6] as to its viability through Psalms study and which has set the agenda in so many ways since, attempted to cover both dimensions. The forms of the various Psalms were first analysed and then the famous *Sitz im Leben* (setting in life) of those forms, which turned out to be a rather limited notion of historical context. Variations on these two great continents of Psalms study, which I will divide roughly between form and content, still seem to be in operation.

Let us begin by taking a step back to the earliest efforts at organizing the Psalms, efforts that appear in the various peripheral signs and texts. Notably, these efforts are partial, seeming to run out of steam at a certain point in the process. Initially, there is the organization into books, the five books that echo the Torah at least: 1– 41 in book I, 42–72 in book II, 73–89 in book III, 90–106 in book IV and 107–50 in book V. Apart from this loose effort, which has no discernible reason for its organization in terms of the Psalms themselves, another effort at organization appears. Now most (but not all) of the Psalms fall into two large groups, the first marked by those various half-known and guessed-at directions, possibly

[6] Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *An Introduction to the Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (trans. J. D. Nogalski; Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998); Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Einletung in die Psalmen: die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels.* (trans. J. D. Nogalski; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933).

of a musical tone, with the dominant feature being the phrase 'to the choirmaster', (these include 4–6, 8, 9, 11–14, 18–22, 31, 36, 39–42, 44–9, 51–62, 64–70, 75–7, 80, 81, 84, 85, 88, 109, 139, 140). The other group is then the Psalms ascribed to David, although at times these overlap with the previous category (4–6, 8, 9, 11–17, 19–21, 22–9, 31, 32, 35–41, 53, 55, 61, 64, 65, 68–70, 86, 101, 103, 108–10, 122, 124, 132, 138–41, 143–5). A further grouping seems to arise from those Psalms identified with various moments in David's biography, in a pattern reminiscent of musicals: Psalms 3, 7, 18, 30, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63 and 142. I want to take this as a distinct group, for they stand in contrast to the ones with the various musical notations, to which one may add the Songs of Ascents (120–9, 131–4). These psalms smell of liturgy, collective worship perhaps, but I am jumping the gun a little. What they seem to do is provide a counterpoint to the very personal nature of the Psalms ascribed to David at crucial moments of his 'life', even though this group of personal Psalms at first appears closely related to the more general category of David's Psalms. By now the various efforts at organization begin to run into one another, creating more confusion than clarity. Indeed, the Psalms of David are part of another group of superscripted authorship: the sons of Korah (42, 44–7, 49, 84, 85, 87, 88), Asaph (50, 73–83), Solomon (72, 127), Ethan the Ezrahite (89) and even Moses (90).

It seems to me that we have the raw material for an initial square, one that will turn out to be somewhat temporary, yet useful in pointing the way forward:



The initial contradiction is that between the musical superscriptions and David's personal life, which stand at odds with one another in the traditional arrangement of the Psalms. The former are obscure, half-understood, apparently in the context of worship and collective liturgy, whereas the latter is highly personal, the psalms in question being individual responses to significant moments in a life. The negative to the musical notations is comprised of the plethora of Psalms ascribed to David, the sons of Korah,

Asaph, Solomon, Ethan the Ezrahite and Moses, characterized by identification according to a distinct author over against the anonymous 'choirmaster' and other bits and pieces of information that float free. The two terms of David's life and the individual authors become part of the lateral axis (on the right-hand side), that is characterized by the specificity of life and author, a way of fixing the Psalms in a particular way. Yet, all of these efforts end up being half-hearted and haphazard, the Psalms of David, for instance, being scattered all over the collection, as are those of David's life, or the authorship of the sons of Korah and so on. In other words, the effort at ordering, of locating the Psalms, runs aground at each turn. And so we find the elusive final term, the one I have identified with a question mark. Is it perhaps the organization in terms of the five books, an entirely arbitrary arrangement that rides roughshod over the others, disregarding what goes on in the other categories to achieve order at any price?

However, this is only a preliminary square, one that maps the initial efforts at formal organization without facing the problem. And this problem shows up with the remaining Psalms that are left free of any identifier, not located in any way until the arbitrary arrangement into five books. In other words, the question that the Psalms raise is: what is to be done with this floating, disordered collection? The feature of the Psalms that emerges from reading them is that after a while one often seems to be very much like the other until they begin to blur and feel like the same psalm repeated over and over again. They float or drift in an apparently timeless moment, fixed to nothing apart from the calls on Yahweh, the blessings and complaints, words of thanks and on and on. Such a drifting sensation comes to the surface in the amorphousness of the collection in the Qumran texts, as well as the extra Psalm in the Septuagint. Nor do the Psalms remain within the Masoretic collection of 150, for Psalms appear in other contexts of the Hebrew Bible, such as those of Moses and Miriam in Exodus 15, Deborah and Barak in Judges 5, Hannah in 1 Samuel 2, David in 2 Samuel 1.19–26 and 22.2–23.7. The spillage across the Hebrew Bible continues, for Psalms 105.1–15, 96.1–13 and 106.47–8 double up in 1 Chronicles 16.8–36 – a curious rearrangement which points to the interchangeable nature of the bits and pieces of the Psalms, the lack of fixation even in the demarcation, numbering and ordering of the existing Psalms. This fluidity of verses and

sections appears within the collection of Psalms themselves, as with Psalm 108, a double over with Psalms 57.7–11 and 60.5–12. Perhaps we need to draw on Robert Culley's argument – that the Psalms indicate a certain pool of images (the pit, sleeplessness, enemies, animals, temple and so on) that are quite limited in number but unlimited in usage – at this point, since it is precisely the interchangeableness that is a characteristic of the Psalms. But it also means, as he argues, that no one Psalm can be interpreted in isolation. Thus, in his study of Psalm 88, one of the most gloomy and depressing in the collection with no redemption or rescue, he argues that it must be understood within the context of the other complaint Psalms, that its emphasis on abandonment by Yahweh becomes one part of a larger pattern in the complaint where a word of rescue appears at the end.[7]

Floating versus anchoring

The initial problem, then, is one of floating, fluidity, interchangeableness and lack of anchoring. In this light, the various efforts I have discussed above – the musical superscriptions, the location in David's life, the ascription to Asaph, David, Moses et al. and the organization into five books – can be understood as a response to the problem of flotation. In each case, there is an effort to fix the Psalms, to anchor them in a way that enables some sense to be made of the endless flow of emotion. So, the half-understood terms that seem to refer to music connect the written words with music, with singing and possibly liturgy itself. The long history of regarding the Psalms as the core of Christian and Jewish sung worship carries on this attempt at locating the words in a collective sung moment, the materiality of voices and instruments tying them in. At this level, rather than opposing these musical associations, the identification of particular moments in the life of David, from caves (Ps. 57, 142) to madness before Abimelech (Ps. 34), become even stronger efforts to fix the Psalms, creating a biography in song of David himself. The strength of this effort shows up not only in

[7] Robert Culley, 'Psalm 88 among the Complaints', *Ascribe to the Lord: Biblical and Other Studies in Memory of Peter C. Craigie* (Lyle Eslinger and Glen Taylor (eds); Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1988), pp. 289–302.

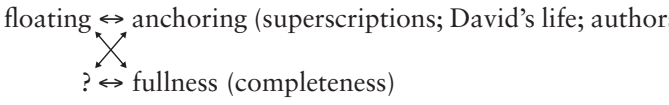
the long tradition that associated the Psalms with David (texts like 1 Sam. 16.14–23 and 18.11 are part of this larger picture), but in the appeal of the individual biography itself, that item with which subsequent readers can identify most closely. Individual authorship follows a similar logic, the relative lack of fixation in comparison to the life of David compensated for by the sheer number of authors of Psalms listed – 81 Psalms are attributed to David, the sons of Korah, Asaph, Solomon, Ethan the Ezrahite and Moses. But it is the organization into the five books that shows the tension between the fluidity of the Psalms and the efforts to fix them in some way or another: the over-arching ability to place the Psalms in five books must sacrifice nearly all of the specificity that the other efforts achieve. And yet, the efforts at greater specificity in their turn break down on the other side of the tension, for they can cover only some of the Psalms, and the various attempts at fixation are both scattered and overlap with the others. The closest we come, after the five books, to a sustained organization is with the musical material, yet the anonymity and obscurity of these items gives ground on specificity for the sake of striking a little closer to complete organization.

The deeper tension with the Psalms may be described as one between floating and anchoring, between fluidity and the effort to cease the perpetual movement of the Psalms into one another and across the Hebrew Bible.

floating ⇔ anchoring

However, another feature of the Psalms that this initial opposition does not face directly is their number. Of course, 150 Psalms appear in the Hebrew canon, but the sense of number is multiplied exponentially by the endless repetition of certain types of psalms, motifs, phrases, images and words themselves, so that the repetition gives the impression of abundance and fullness. The effect of this endless running on is, paradoxically, an impression of completion, of absolute containment of all that there is to say about Yahweh, life and the universe. If anything, the Psalm of the law (Ps. 119) gives this sense in microcosm (and anyone who has been in a worship situation where the whole Psalm was sung can attest to this), for its interminable repetition of a limited set of ideas – the notion that Yahweh's statutes are good, and that the wicked

do not follow them while the 'I' of the Psalm does – gives the impression of a much longer Psalm. All that can be said, or sung, has certainly been said! I want to suggest, then, that the contrary term to flotation and interchangeableness becomes fullness and completion, the sense that the Psalms contain everything, so much so that they fall back into repeating the same thing time and again.



Scholarly anchoring

Thus far, I have focused on the early efforts at ordering and anchoring the Psalms. Now I would like to consider the various critical approaches mentioned earlier, all the while leaving the crucial fourth term (the 'non–not' term) at the left-hand bottom corner until later.

The older concern with dating the Psalms has been revived in idiosyncratic form by Goulder.[8] The earliest critical efforts, those epitomized by the International Critical Commentary of Briggs and Briggs (1914),[9] attempted a series of tasks, ranging through from identification of the author, dating the Psalms, trying to track the development of the collection itself by specifying when and where each Psalm was composed and by whom, to detailed textual analysis. This critical text, published at the moment the First World War was engulfing Europe, embodies all that was best about biblical scholarship in the nineteenth century – a combination of what was then termed lower (textual) and higher (what we now term source) criticism. Its enterprise is one that falls within

[8] Michael D. Goulder, *The Psalms of the Sons of Korah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1983); Michael D. Goulder, *The Prayers of David: Psalms 51–72. Studies in the Psalter, II* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990); Michael D. Goulder, *The Psalms of Asaph and the Pentateuch: Studies in the Psalter, III* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); Michael D. Goulder, *The Psalms of the Return (Book V, Psalms 107–150): Studies in the Psalter, IV* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

[9] A. B. Briggs and E. G. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (International Critical Commentary; New York: Scribner's, 1914).

a certain logic, namely that of treating the text as a layer, a censor, which the critic must outflank in order to get behind it to the real concerns of biblical scholarship: the history of the text itself and the history from which it arose. Thus, in an effort that still remains unsurpassed for its thoroughness with the available sources as well as the linguistic skills of the authors, the commentary of Briggs and Briggs contains the most detailed textual analysis, including the use of the various versions (Greek, Latin and Syriac), in order to establish the earliest possible text behind the Masoretic Text and the subsequent manuscript history of the text. At the same time that such a comprehensive task was undertaken, Briggs and Briggs attempted to determine the various ages of the psalms in place of the overweening desire to speculate on an author, although they do that too. In other words, while they denied the Davidic authorship, or even that of Asaph or Solomon or Moses, they sought to fix the psalms as far as possible in a temporal sequence. The concern with the impossible task of identifying an author still tempts some. For instance, for Kraus it was a private individual,[10] for Mowinckel the temple staff were responsible,[11] Goulder has it that Psalms 51–72 were composed by one of David's priests,[12] whereas for Tournay it was the Levitical singers in the late period of the Chronicler, c. 300 BCE.[13] My suggestion is, then, that commentaries like those of Briggs and Briggs, or the extraordinary and idiosyncratic revival of this older project in the effort to fix the Psalms as completely as possible in Goulder's work, along with the continued effort at constructing endless hypotheses regarding authorship, function as the lateral or deictic axis that links both fixation and completeness.

Another group of critics follow a similar logic, the effort to locate the historical context of the psalms, although with a very different focus from the now fossilized historical-critical efforts of Briggs and Briggs and the like. I think here, for instance, of the

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[10] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59: A Commentary* (trans. H. C. Oswald; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988).

[11] Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas; Oxford: Blackwell, 1962).

[12] Goulder, *The Prayers of David: Psalms 51–72. Studies in the Psalter, II*.

[13] Raymond Tournay, *Seeing and Hearing God with the Psalms: The Prophetic Liturgy of the Second Temple in Jerusalem* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991).

social-scientific work of Gerstenberger.[14] He is concerned with the social setting of the Psalms, although those settings become individual moments of mourning, loss or socio-economic difficulty, or collective rituals for different moments of community life – harvest, defeat in warfare, victory and so on.

However, Gerstenberger's commentary is explicitly form-critical, one point of the traditional tripod of historical criticism itself, and the overwhelming focus in various ways, whether as an explicit focus for discussion or as the assumed background for further work, has been on the question of form. In this case, many carry on the task Gunkel set in specifying the various genres of the Psalms – organized broadly into lament, complaint, thanksgiving, praise, royal, victory, Zion and Yahweh-as-king psalms, on communal and individual levels – and their arrangement and interrelation.[15] Others have pursued linguistic studies in order to make sense of the many *hapax legomena* and the sheer lack of sense that so many of the Psalms seem to generate.[16]

Back to Gunkel

So it is useful to go back and see what Gunkel does with the Psalms. Gunkel's great effort was to bring together the concern with genre (*Gattung*) and the setting in life (*Sitz im Leben*) of those genres. As is well known, he distinguished between various types of psalms, such as lament, complaint, royal and thanksgiving psalms. With a background in German pietism, he tended to ascribe the psalms to anonymous individuals, although in a collective context – his romantic image of the campfire around which the oral tradition was passed on – but what interests me here is less the fixation that

[14] Erhard Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 1; With an Introduction to Cultic Poetry* (Forms of Old Testament Literature; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988).

[15] Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (trans. K. R. Crim and R. N. Soulen; Atlanta: John Knox, 1971); Kraus, *Psalms 1–59: A Commentary*; Harry Nasuti, *Defining the Sacred Songs: Genre, Tradition, and the Post-Critical Interpretation of the Psalms* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

[16] The older study by Dahood is still the premier example. Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms. Volumes I–III* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966–70).

the whole notion of *Sitz im Leben* implies[17] as the alternative and still highly promising notion of form.

All the same, it seems to me that the innovation that Gunkel brought about relates to the question of form, which may be read an alternative way of focusing on the problem that the Psalms pose for interpretation, namely the sensation of floating that one feels upon reading psalm after psalm, the feeling that one could start anywhere and yet end up with the same motifs, the same words and patterns. Psalm 108 is the example that explicitly reveals such floatation, for its compilation of, or perhaps division into, Psalms 57.8–12 (ET 7–11) and 60.7–14 (ET 5–12) brings to the surface a sense that has already been there for some time: the Psalms float about all over the place, the one interchangeable with the other in a perpetual ebb and flow. Thus, even the transition between the two pieces is as smooth as that in Psalm 60: the 'so that' of Psalms 108.7 follows on just as well from Psalms 108.6 as from Psalms 60.6.

> You have set up for those who fear you a banner
> to rally to it from the bow. (Ps. 60.6)
> Be exalted, O god, upon the heavens
> And over all the earth your glory. (Ps 108.6)

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[17] In its heyday, the search for the setting in life led to ever greater flights of imaginative reconstruction. Thus, Mowinckel constructed the vast hypothesis, now fallen by the wayside, of an annual cultic ceremony, not referred to explicitly anywhere in the Hebrew Bible itself but appearing in other ancient Southwest Asian societies. This did not stop the proposals of ever more high festivals, whether an annual enthronement festival for Yahweh, or an annual covenant festival, or perhaps one for royal Zion. Eaton went so far as to locate nearly all the psalms in terms of ritual functions of the king at a range of royal festivals, while Goulder attempted to go one better and finds their liturgical context in Dan, Bethel and Jerusalem, as well in the times of Ezra and Nehemiah. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*; Steven Croft, *The Identity of the Individual in the Psalms* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987); Artur Weiser, 'Die Legitimation des Königs David: Zur Eigenart und Entstehung der sogen. Geschichte von Davids Aufstieg', *Vetus Testamentum* 16, 325–54 (1960); Kraus, *Psalms 1–59: A Commentary*; John H. Eaton, *Kingship in the Psalms* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1986); Goulder, *The Psalms of the Sons of Korah*; Goulder, *The Prayers of David: Psalms 51–72. Studies in the Psalter, II*; Goulder, *The Psalms of Asaph and the Pentateuch: Studies in the Psalter, III*; Goulder, *The Psalms of the Return (Book V, Psalms 107–150): Studies in the Psalter, IV*.

So that your beloved may be delivered
Rescue with your right hand and answer me! (Pss. 60.7 and 108.7)

It is not that Psalm 108 is the odd example in the collection, even in connection with the various pieces (Pss. 105.1–15; 96.1–13 and 106.47–8) that make up 1 Chronicles 16.8–36, but that it is the obvious example that characterizes the Psalms as a whole, the moment when the tendency of the whole collection rises to the surface and becomes clear. What Gunkel attempted was not a fixation in time and place, but a way of making sense of the interchangeableness of the Psalms. With enough examples in the collection itself, Gunkel distinguished between lament and complaint, thanksgiving and praise, royal and victory and Psalms of Zion and Yahweh-as-king. In one sense, this is of course an alternative mode of fixing the Psalms in a manner reminiscent of those that sought to order the Psalms in terms of author, the biography of David or musical directions, but in the emphasis on oral material it differs qualitatively from these efforts, as well as the earlier historical-critical efforts at dating the literature and searching for the historical situation. To be sure, Gunkel was too much of a historical critic not to deal with these questions as well, but these interests must be seen as an effort to anchor the tossing ship of form itself which has a tendency to float free from such fixation. Another way of putting it is that the potential of Gunkel's analysis of form has yet to be realized, as hinted by the scattered attempts at 'literary' readings, set free from the older concerns of historical criticism itself.[18]

What Gunkel achieved was less a fixation of the Psalms into various forms as the recognition of their fluidity, since the various forms themselves serve to highlight precisely this feature of the Psalms. What I mean is that what we now have – and Psalms criticism cannot escape the delineation into various forms after Gunkel – are vast blocks of material within which the free flow

[18] See, for instance, Martin Ravndal Hauge, *Between Sheol and Temple: Motif Structure and Function in the I–Psalms* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995). Was it not out of form criticism that the first attempts at moving beyond historical criticism were made, marked now by James Muilenberg, 'Form Criticism and Beyond', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969), pp. 1–18.

of the Psalms is enhanced. This is especially true of the larger groupings such as lament, complaint and thanks, within which the flow of motifs and terminology is allowed to run without the effort at fixing them that has characterized so much criticism. In his studies of the complaints, Robert Culley has emphasized that no one complaint Psalm can be read without the others in mind, or rather without the form of the complaint Psalms as a whole impinging on the particular Psalm in question. And yet, Psalms criticism gives in repeatedly to the temptation to take on a small identifiable chunk – the overwhelming focus is on individual Psalms, or Psalms of the sons of Korah, or most notably the royal Psalms which are few in number. But even with the forms in place, the boundaries themselves remain fluid and debated, for not all of the Psalms fit neatly into the various forms. For instance, Psalms 57 and 60 are complaints with their characteristic pattern of complaint and rescue, but in their combination in Psalms 108 they become a psalm of praise – although even here it is not a pure praise psalm, the echo of the complaint in the final verses of Psalm 60 recurring at the close of 108.

Form criticism, then, and the possibilities that still remain to be realized, comprises the complex term (across the top) of the semiotic square, the connection between floating and anchoring, not merely in terms of form and setting in life, but also in the tension of the study of form itself, the incomplete delineation of various forms, the focus on oral texts and the recognition of the fluidity of the Psalms in the attempt to identity various forms.

Devotion, theology and emptiness

We have explored almost all of the ideological possibilities opened up by the Psalms. However, three items remain to be identified, namely, the lateral axis (left side), neutral term (bottom) and the evasive fourth corner of the basic square (bottom left). Now they fall into place more easily. To begin with, I suggest that the left-hand lateral axis is the realm of personal devotion and piety. So many studies of the Psalms end up here, arguing that the Psalms themselves express either a personal devotion or a collective piety, a direct response of the heart to God. In fact, such devotional readings often

form the other side of critical scholarship,[19] the element of religious commitment that biblical critics time and again suspend in order to undertake their critical work. Apart from such studies, the long tradition of the Psalms' central role in both Jewish and Christian lectionaries, let alone their basis for singing, seeks to make use of them in a way that carries on their initial purpose. Or they may be used in countless private devotional activities, biblical scholars lending their hands to Bible study booklets produced by the various churches, collections of prayers and readings or the occasional text that emphasizes their function in such a private realm.

The devotional use of the Psalms gives free reign to the fluid and interchangeable sense of the Psalms, but what is the other term with which it connects, that difficult fourth term on the bottom left? In order to identify it, let me begin with what is known as the neutral term, the one that links the two items across the bottom of the diagram. Here we may find theology. As the full diagram below shows, theology is distinct from devotion, since the systematic nature of theology is a distinct enterprise from piety itself. Even more, we should maintain the difference between theology and biblical criticism (again, see the diagram). Often the two are linked, as we find in with the work of Kraus and Anderson, for instance, or even Westermann, who attempt to base their theological reflections on biblical material. The fiction that such categories actually arise from the Bible avoids the fact that theology and biblical studies are uneasy partners, a sign of the appropriation of the Bible by theology and the imposition of its categories on the unruly biblical texts. The relevance of this tension here is that theology seeks a certain completeness or fullness that is provided by the systematization that comes through the theological tradition. Through its key categories – God, anthropology, harmatology, Christology,

[19] Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* (5th edn; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968); A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms* (London: Oliphants, 1972); Kraus, *Psalms 1–59: A Commentary*; Craig C. Broyles, *The Conflict of Faith and Experience in the Psalms: A Form-Critical and Theological Study* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989); John H. Eaton, *Psalms of the Way and the Kingdom: A Conference with the Commentators* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); Robert L. Cole, *The Shape and Message of Book III (Psalms 73–89)* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

salvation, sanctification and eschatology – the master narrative of theology brings to bear a complete system on the material at hand. Under the umbrella of theology too may be located the search for thematic consistency. This search may not be overtly theological, but its desire for ideological coherence reveals a theological impulse. Gottwald, for instance, argues that there is a movement from lament to praise,[20] whereas Alter sees the themes of death and rebirth and the human–God relationship,[21] while others find themes of hope and refuge.[22]

Finally, we can identify the elusive double negative of the bottom left-hand corner of the original square. This is where the lateral axis (devotion) and the neutral term (theology) touch. After much scribbling and blackening of pages, I suggest that this term is emptiness. We need to be careful at this point, for by emptiness I mean not futility but an absence. Both theology and devotion concern what cannot be verified, an apparent lack in the structure that actually maintains the whole structure. The term for that emptiness is variously God, Yahweh, El and so on. These names may be seen as inadequate place holders for what cannot be adequately named. Indeed, both theology and devotion must negotiate that tricky tension between absence and presence. The God that concerns them is not present in any conventional sense. Thus, theology attempts to mediate in its own way the tension between emptiness and fullness, between the empirical absence of God and the sense that God is everywhere. And theology does so through an effort at systematization, by trying to say everything concerning something that cannot be known. For its part, devotion mediates between floating and emptiness, attempting to invoke that absence through the interchangeable use of images, phrases and words. (As the diagram indicates, emptiness is also the negative of the drive to fix and locate the Psalms in some way or another.) Devotional interpretations then become the combination of both

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[20] Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002 [1985]).

[21] Robert Alter, 'Psalms', *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (eds); Cambridge: Belknap, 1987), pp. 244–62.

[22] Cole, *The Shape and Message of Book III (Psalms 73–89)*; Jerome Creach, *Yahweh as Refuge and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

interchangeableness and emptiness, while theology brings together the desire for a complete explanation and the absent nature of its referent.

I can now complete the ideological possibilities of the Psalms and their scholarship as follows:

Conclusion: Ideological limits

I hope that this effort at spatially mapping the ideological possibilities and tensions of the Psalms (and its scholarship) exhausts all of the available possibilities. This is precisely what Jameson intends with his deployment of the semiotic square. Or rather, it is one role that the square plays. The other is that it enables one to identify what has been excluded. As we would expect with an ideological system, its impression of completeness, of having said everything there is to say, is based upon the exclusion of what cannot be included. Here that difficult-to-identify fourth term of the basic square – the term that I held until the end – becomes the signal of what is excluded. With the Psalms, that item is none other than its prime concern, God, the one who occupies the space of emptiness. The whole system of the Psalms is then based on what is not part of the system. Yet, this is merely the first step in identifying what is excluded, for the deity becomes an indicator of the socio-economic system, the mode of production, within which the Psalms arise.

Summary

- Fredric Jameson, the foremost Marxist in the USA, draws from Althusser to argue that literature functions as an imaginary resolution of real social and economic contradictions.
- One way in which these attempted resolutions appear is through formal tensions in a text.
- Jameson deploys Greimas's semiotic square to map the ideological possibilities and limits of a text.
- The collection of Psalms and its scholarship may be analysed in terms of this semiotic square.
- The primary tension is between floating versus anchoring, as scholarship and even early editors of the Psalms attempted to anchor them in response to their indeterminate nature.
- The key term turns out to be emptiness, at the intersection between devotion and theology.
- That emptiness indicates both the ideological limits of the Psalms and points to what cannot be included.

11

Walter Benjamin: The unknowable apocalyptic of Daniel

Walter Benjamin's observations concerning allegory and language at first seem easily applicable to biblical interpretation, since the Bible plays a significant role in his thought. The catch is that it is not easy to extract a method of interpretation from his work. So I seek some insights, especially regarding the gap between language and what it is supposed to represent, between the word and thing to which the word refers. These insights provide me with a way of dealing with some of the problems of Daniel 7–12 and its visions. In this text we find a tension between the allusive and metaphorical language of the vision and a desire both by the text and subsequent scholars to fix the text to particular historical events and times. In other words, the language of Daniel 7–12 (apocalyptic language) is both referential and anti-referential. Benjamin aids us in seeing how it is both at the same time.

The modalities of allegory

For Benjamin, language constantly resists being tied to its referent. This argument appears in his studies of allegory and of language,

with which I deal in turn.[1] As for allegory, the most significant statement appears in his early *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, only to become the underlying method of his Arcades project.[2] Allegory of course has a tradition in biblical criticism that runs back to the earliest interpretation of the Bible, used by Origen for instance, who himself adapted a strategy used by the rationalist Hellenists who found the myths of ancient Greece a little too crude for comfort and so interpreted them allegorically – as emotions, or the faculties of human activity, or as the forces of nature and so on. Yet, the paradox of allegory is that although it was the main type of biblical analysis for a millennium and a half, it fell by the wayside when modern 'historical-critical' methods became the norm. The new ideals of science and reason had no place for allegory. So Benjamin's recovery of allegory is untimely, an unfashionable approach when he first began writing in the first half of the twentieth century.

Briefly put, for Benjamin allegory operates by the non-expression of the object to which it relates. That is, allegorical language speaks of something that remains hidden, just below the horizon, but is nevertheless present. It is also a signal of the ruined and fragmented nature of history; the hidden 'truth' concealed in such ruins could be opened only with an allegorical method. Allegory therefore speaks indirectly. It looks askance, using images and metaphors, to see and hear what cannot be seen and heard in the usual way. Yet allegory also has a redemptive function, seeking to save something worthwhile from the disaster of human history.

So allegory attempts to locate a referent that is concealed, if not absent, in language itself. Benjamin argues that allegory is a distinctly Christian practice (albeit with Greek and Roman precursors), and he seeks for the secret in the Middle Ages. Four features may be identified: the struggle against the pagan gods, the Fall, guilt and the torment of the flesh. For our purposes, the

[1] It is worth noting here that the language of these arguments is obtuse, as if Benjamin seeks to develop his point in the form of his texts. Paradoxically, I try to be as clear as possible, using language in a way that Benjamin resisted at every turn.

[2] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (trans. John Osborne; London: Verso, 1998); Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin; Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999).

question of the gods illustrates his point best.[3] As Christianity spread throughout ancient Southwest Asia and especially Europe, it had to deal with the older gods that it encountered. These pagan gods were expelled from heaven and placed in hell and on earth, becoming demons and magical creatures instead of gods. Yet, in proper dialectical fashion, Benjamin does not argue that allegory was a way of reading the gods out of existence, of substituting them with abstractions and human faculties; rather, allegory enabled the preservation of the gods and their world in a hostile environment.[4] At the same time, allegory was also an effort to neutralize the danger of the ancient gods, a strategy to deal with them precisely because it was not possible to banish them so easily. Had it been possible to do so, then allegory would not have arisen. Instead, it is precisely because these ancient divinities had held power for so long that some method of acknowledging and transforming such a situation was required. This argument concerning the pagan gods enables Benjamin to make his more general argument about allegory, namely, that it is a method for preserving in another form what is passing away. It matters not whether it is a specific era (for the Middle Ages it was classical antiquity) or the past in general, for allegory reminds us that all worlds and eras are transient: 'Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things.'[5]

Allegory therefore seeks something permanent in the midst of impermanence, a way of holding onto a history that continually slips through the fingers. The reason we use allegory for this effort – with its images, symbols, stories and strange modes of interpretation – is that the history in question cannot be preserved in any

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[3] The Fall (of Adam and Eve) becomes a symbol of history, guilt a signal of the process of forgetting history and the flesh a site for the allegorical presence of the older, pagan gods, who had to be driven out by ascetic practices.

[4] 'For an appreciation of the transience of things, and the concern to rescue them for eternity, is one of the strongest impulses in allegory.' Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 223.

[5] Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, pp. 177–8. Note also: 'In allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape. This is the heart of the allegorical way of seeing, of the Baroque, secular explanation of history as the Passion of the world; its importance resides solely in the stations of decline.' Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 166.

conventional manner. Normal words are not enough, for they reflect the sensibilities of the present, not the past. So the curious language of allegory attempts to do what ordinary language cannot, to represent what has disappeared.

Language and its referent

The second feature of Benjamin's approach concerns language itself, although that has already been present in my brief discussion of allegory. The key essay with direct relevance for the study of Daniel is 'On Language as such and on the Language of Man'.[6] Here he argues in his elliptical style that language fails to provide a connection with the thing to which it refers. He criticizes what he calls the empty 'bourgeois conception of language'.[7] For this theory, language is merely an instrument of communication, according to which language communicates factual subject matter: 'It holds that the means of communication is the word, its object factual, and its addressee a human being.'[8] Further, bourgeois linguistic theory holds that there is an accidental relation between word and object, agreed to by some explicit or implied convention. Language is, for this approach, nothing other than a system of '*mere* signs'.[9]

In order to provide an alternative theory of language, Benjamin offers an interpretation of Genesis 1–3 (and Chapter 11). He begins by accounting for the bourgeois theory of language – that words mean something and are addressed to another person – by means of the Fall. That Fall is not merely the result of the disobedience of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, but also the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. What is the result of the Fall? Its consequence is a multiplicity of human languages, of translations and thereby of human knowledge. You have translation and human knowledge only when languages are multiple. More importantly, the result of the Fall is a new human language: 'The word must communicate

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[6] Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913–1926* (Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (eds); Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap, 1996), pp. 62–74.
[7] Benjamin, *Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913–1926*, p. 65.
[8] Benjamin, *Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913–1926*, p. 65.
[9] Benjamin, *Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913–1926*, p. 69.

something (other than itself). In that fact lies the true Fall of the spirit of language.'[10]

Earlier, I mentioned that that the multiplicity of languages and the direct reference of words to things resulted in knowledge. How so? Benjamin connects these features of language with the knowledge of good and evil, knowledge that is gained when the two human beings eat from the first tree (as promised by the serpent). Yet, this knowledgeable language is what Benjamin calls 'prattle' (*Geschwätz)*, and it is this language that leads to the expulsion from the Garden. Prattle has a number of senses in Benjamin's text, apart from its associations with useless 'small-talk'. He writes of 'the abyss of prattle', 'the empty word', 'the word as means', 'the abyss of the mediateness of all communication' and the babble of many languages. Ultimately, prattle is nothing less than what he earlier called bourgeois language. It is empty, confusing, entangled – all because it assumes two features of language: that words are meant to refer to things, and that such a relationship is entirely arbitrary. We need to note his point carefully here, for he challenges the basic assumptions of modern language theory. Let me use the example of cup: the word 'cup' refers to a real cup, made of porcelain or tin or whatever. Yet this relationship between the word 'cup' and the real cup is arbitrary. No reason can be found for using this word, 'cup', for this thing. So we need some agreement, a convention to agree that 'cup' does refer to cup and not to bicycle. For Benjamin, this is simply bourgeois 'prattle'.

A final question remains: what does Benjamin mean by the 'Fall'? The story of Genesis 3, with its serpent and two naked human beings, is a myth. In the essay 'On Language', he does not specify what he means by the Fall, although he offers a hint with his comments on 'bourgeois' theories of language. However, in his later essay on Karl Kraus,[11] he explicitly argues that capitalism is the world after the Fall, a world full of base 'prattle' that the German writer, Kraus, continually resists. Against the useless language of journalism, against the desire for relevance, Kraus holds onto the ideal language of creation. He is nothing less than

[10] Benjamin, *Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913–1926*. Italics in text.
[11] Benjamin, *Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913–1926*, pp. 239–73.

a latter-day Adam for whom the language of naming is still an option.

With my comment on Kraus, I have already begun to answer the question as to what language before the Fall – authentic language – might look like. In opposition to the bourgeois theory of language, this authentic language 'knows no means, no object, and no addressee of communication. It means: *in the name, the mental being of man communicates itself to God*' (1996: 65; italics in text).[12] Let us explore what he means by this statement. The three items of an instrumental theory of language are negated: language is not a tool of communication, does not refer to any object and does not address anyone. At this point, some readers may be shaking their heads. What is the point of language if it does not communicate a message to someone? Is this language at all? At least Benjamin has the reader's attention. He goes on by reshaping the very meaning of communication: it happens not *through* language but *in* language. Language is not a tool but the very being of communication, and that happens in the act of naming, which is the linguistic being of 'man'. That is, the idea that communication takes place *in* language is shown by the act of naming (God names the world as it is created, and Adam names the animals and then the woman). Naming is nothing less than 'the innermost nature of language itself'.[13] Further, against the multiplicity of languages that result from the Fall, specifically through the Babel story of Genesis 11, pure language is unitary, primordial and harmonious.[14] Once again, one may object that naming too is an act of referring to an object for the benefit of someone else. In reply, the text of Genesis comes to Benjamin's aid to show how it is not so. So let us consider that text more closely.

Genesis 1–3 provides Benjamin with a comprehensive argument for the nature of language as naming, of human beings as

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[12] Benjamin, *Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913–1926*, p. 65.

[13] Benjamin, *Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913–1926*, p. 65.

[14] In the short essay 'Language and Logic' he writes: 'If we interpret this in the spirit of the mystics as pointing to a revealed unity of a linguistic kind, it will mean not just that this primordial language is the one originally spoken, but that the harmony originally created by those spoken languages was of incomparably greater power than any of the individual languages would possibly possess.' Benjamin, *Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913–1926*, p. 273.

name-givers, which is ultimately modelled on God as name-giver. To summarize Benjamin's points: both accounts of creation (Gen. 1.1–2.3 and 2.3–25) emphasize a special relation between language and humans through the act of creation. In the first account, God's creative act establishes a deep relation between 'Let there be…', 'he made' and 'he named'. To name is to create. Thus, only with God are word and name one, so much so that God's creative being is naming. Crucially, with whom does God communicate? No one. This is language at its purest, in which something comes into being through naming, in which language is itself creative, in which language has no addressee.

In the second account of creation, the human being is created from earth and endowed with the gift of language. Benjamin connects this account with Genesis 1.27, for when Adam is made in the image of God (marked by a threefold 'he created') he uses the same language of naming as God. How do we know? Like God, Adam engages in naming. He first names the animals and then the woman, but with a crucial difference: unlike his naming of the animals, Adam gives the woman a proper name, calling her 'Eve'. As Benjamin writes, 'The proper name is the communion of man with the *creative* word of God (Not the only one, however; man knows a further linguistic communion with God)'.[15] Just as God named 'earth', 'heavens' and so on, so also does Adam name 'Eve'. But to whom does Adam address this naming? He addresses it to God, which is the same as saying no one. Now Benjamin is able to answer the question concerning the arbitrary relation between words and things (as held by the instrumental bourgeois theory of language). The relation is not arbitrary, for there is an intrinsic relation between words and things.

Benjamin's interpretation is of course interested in a particular issue, that of language. As an act of creative naming, language holds the objects it names within itself. I would like to interpret this as the minimal point that language fails the test of referring to something outside itself. At this level, his argument comes close to his discussion of allegory, which by its nature attempts to refer to and hold onto something that is lost. Allegorical language too struggles to find a referent. In the language essay he makes

[15] Benjamin, *Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913–1926*, p. 69.

a distinction between useless 'bourgeois' language and a pure language before the Fall, between language as means, sign and plurality and as none of these, between language as instrumental and non-instrumental. In short, it is the difference between communication through language to pass on information to someone about an object, and communication in language, in which situation only God can be the recipient of what is now a language of naming. By its very nature, pure language remains within itself and is thereby unable to provide a bridge outside itself. It remains to be seen whether the book of Daniel, with its curiously allegorical language, is caught in the same bind.

The tensions of language in Daniel

The visions of Daniel in the second half of the book (Chapters 7–14) are, of course, the prime exhibit in the Hebrew Bible of apocalyptic material. Chapters 7 and 8 present two major visions, one of the lion, bear, leopard and monster, the second of the ram and the goat, each followed by a brief interpretation from a heavenly visitor (anonymous in Dan. 7.16, 10.10, 16, but Gabriel in Dan. 8.16–17, 9.21). However, after the 'prayer' of Chapter 9, the rest of the collection is taken up with a lengthy interpretation and prediction of events that is a curious mix of apparent specificity and mythical motifs.

Seeking a referent

Following the cue of the text, critics have rarely been able to resist the temptation to crack the code of the apocalyptic language. They seek a firm referent or two that can then anchor the text: the 'abomination that desolates' in Daniel 9.27, 11.31 and 12.11 becomes Antiochus IV Epiphanes, one of the most powerful of the Seleucid kings, who persecuted the Jews in the second century BCE.[16] Antiochus thereby becomes locked into place, although the

[16] So, among a host of others, James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh:

source is the highly suspect work by Josephus, *The Jewish War*,[17] which opines that Antiochus attacked Jerusalem as part of his conflict with Ptolemy IV over control of Palestine, an attack that involved plundering the temple and the cessation of sacrifices for three and a half years (identified as 167–64 BCE). (No one seems particularly interested in Pompey, who entered the Holy of Holies in 6 BCE.) Josephus includes some colourful details, such as forcing the Jews to withhold circumcision and to sacrifice pigs on the altar – hence Daniel's thrice-repeated 'abomination that desolates'. Of course the book itself, at least in its final redaction (Chapters 1–6 are usually felt to come slightly earlier), must come from this time as well, when Antiochus was rampaging over Palestine and driving the Ptolemies back. Only when he dies and his son, Antiochus V, becomes ruler, is Judas Maccabaeus able to cleanse the temple and restore worship. Interminable efforts continue to be made to specify when, where and for whom Daniel was written, with Chapters 1–6 usually coming from one source and Chapters 7–12 from the same under different circumstances, or by perhaps another group. The seduction here is the differences between the sections in Hebrew and Aramaic.

However, with the key of Antiochus in place, he can then turn up in other places, such as Daniel 5 or the king of the north in Daniel 11, as he struggles with the king of the south (Ptolemy). The description of the three kings in Chapter 11 may speak of the three successors to Alexander the Great (what about the contested alliance between Caesar, Pompey and Crassus at a later date?). And the 'Kittim' of Daniel 11.30? Are they Greeks, as the word itself suggests, or in fact Romans, as seems to be the case with the Qumran material? Again the identification wavers. The problem is that even in the sections that appear to speak more directly about historical events the language remains coded and obscure. So much so that critic after critic laments the absence of precision and clarity as a great handicap, especially without any other chronicles or annals apart from the highly unreliable Josephus.

T & T Clark, 1964); John J. Collins, *Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); Louis F. Hartman and Alexander DiLella, *The Book of Daniel* (Anchor Bible; Garden City: Doubleday, 1978).

[17] Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War* (trans. G. A. Williamson; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984 [75]), p. 33 [I: 37].

The task of cracking the code continues, with the four beasts of Chapter 7 or the ram and goat of Chapter 8. The minimal interpretation of the first vision leaves critics guessing – Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece or Rome? – but the second vision is more helpful: the ram with the two horns are the kings of Media and Persia (Dan. 8.20), but one must take an imaginary step to identify Cyrus as the ram himself, the one who unites the Medes and the Persians. The he-goat then becomes the 'king of Greece' (Dan. 8.21), but we need to postulate Philip of Macedon to get anywhere. Or is that Alexander the Great? The four horns are the four weaker kings who follow (Dan. 8.22), but the problem here is that three of Alexander's generals divide up the empire between them, not four, unless Alexander himself is the fourth, but he is hardly a weak king. As for the one king who gets rid of the four, is that a Roman general, Pompey perhaps? Again, we cannot be sure. By the time the text gets to the point of superhuman intervention against this final king (Dan. 8.25), most critics feel that the text has reverted to an apocalyptic schema where myth overtakes history. If all of this was not complex enough, the convoluted material in Daniel 11 beggars identification, although many have tried to line up various Ptolemies and Seleucids.[18]

Apart from these perpetual efforts to tie the text of Daniel down to the ebb and flow of quotidian events and the particularity of political history, we also find the inevitable search for a historical context for the book as a whole. Was it Mesopotamian or Hellenistic, and does it show Canaanite influences?[19] Some

[18] In a futile attempt to overcome this problem, Meadowcroft offers an evangelical answer, in that a constant interchange between heaven and earth means that earthly rulers have a heavenly significance. Tim Meadowcroft, 'Who are the Princes of Persia and Greece (Dan. 10)? Pointers Towards the Danielic Vision of Earth and Heaven', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 29, 1 (2004), pp. 99–113.

[19] Karel Van der Toorn, 'Scholars at the Oriental Court: The Figure of Daniel Against Its Mesopotamian Background" *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception, Volume I* (John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint (eds); Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 37–54; Shalom Paul, 'The Mesopotamian Babylonian Background of Daniel 1–6', *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception, Volume I* (John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint (eds); Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 55–68; John Walton, 'The Anzu Myth as Relevant Background for Daniel 7?', *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception, Volume I* (John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint (eds); Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 69–89; André Lacocque, 'Allusions to Creation in Daniel 7', *The Book*

have followed Hanson's argument – drawing on the work of Ernst Troeltsch's distinction between church and sect, as well as Berger and Luckmann's notion of the social construction of reality – that apocalyptic material often appears in the context of oppressed groups: stringent criticism of imperial overlords are coupled with the hope of an extraterrestrial rescue.[20] Gottwald is more specific,[21] drawing on deprivation theory, as well as comparisons with the cargo cults of Melanesia, Polynesia and other places, where Christianity was radically redrawn in terms of the apocalyptic benefits of emergent capitalism, and with the material from millenarian groups in various times and places (for instance, the Hussites or Müntzer's peasants in Germany), in order to make sense of the apocalyptic language of Daniel.[22]

The slippery specificity of textual fantasies

As if to tease commentators, the text of Daniel itself also spills over with references, calculations and efforts to grasp history and wrench it in a particular direction. The conventional dating formula is the most obvious, also found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. So, Daniel 7.1 has, 'In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babel'; Daniel 8.1, 'In the third year of Belshazzar the king'; Daniel 9.1, 'In the first year of Darius son of Ahasuerus'; Daniel 10.1, 'In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia'. The obvious point here is that no one takes these dates as anything but chronological fictions, for the text of Daniel itself appears a good deal later. They are then

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of Daniel: Composition and Reception, Volume I (John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint (eds); Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 114–31.

[20] Paul D. Hanson, 'Apocalyptic Literature', *The Hebrew Bible and Its Modern Interpreters* (Douglas A. Knight and Gene M. Tucker (eds); Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), pp. 465–88.

[21] Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio–Literary Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002 [1985]). See more recently, Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, 'Prayers and Dreams: Power and Diaspora Identities in the Social Setting of the Daniel Tales', *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception, Volume I* (John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint (eds); Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 266–90.

[22] Benjamin's own apocalyptic sensibilities might be understood in a similar way, given his situation in Europe, especially Germany, for assimilated Jews like him at the time of the Nazis' rise to power and then the outbreak of World War II.

literary devices – note the pattern of one and three that also recurs in many of the stories and visions – that attempt to place the book at a much earlier moment, turning the visions into predictions of the future. But do the specific identifications of kings and nations in the vision or dream interpretations function in a similar manner? Commentators are not so ready to ascribe these to the whim of an anonymous author or two. Thus, the identities of Media, Persia and Greece in 8.20–1 and 10.20 seem to grant a specificity lacking elsewhere in the book. But as soon as the text allows us a whiff of history, it blows it away just as quickly, for the kings of Media and Persia are not named. The list of absent names is long: the king of Greece and the four others of 8.22, the prince of Persia in 10.13 and 10.20, the prince of Greece in 10.20, the four kings of Persia in 11.2, the mighty king of Greece in 11.3, the king of the south and the king of the north in Chapter 11, the daughter of the king of south in 11.6 and so on. The only ones who are named apart from Daniel are characters like Gabriel (8.16; 9.21) and Michael (10.13, 21; 12.1), but only someone in an altered state of consciousness is going to suggest that these customers are verifiable historical figures.

The paradox is that just as the text takes off into the purer realms of apocalyptic speculation, it becomes very specific indeed. There seems to be a direct ratio between the communication of explicit detail and pure fantasy. I have in mind the numerological material that the heavenly visitors provide Daniel in moments of blinding insight. The key lies with the solar calculations based on the numbers seven and ten: the year itself is divided into weeks, but then the years themselves fall into lots of seven again, with climactic moments determined by either dividing seven (three and a half is common), or multiplying sevens and tens. Thus, the jubilee itself falls after 70 years, but the massive apocalyptic jubilee after 490 years.

The first of these calculations appears in Daniel 9.2: 'I, Daniel, perceived the number of years which, according to the book of Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.' But the book of Daniel provides the numbers, and so Gabriel the mathematician spells it out for Daniel. The end of transgression and sin, for which Daniel has just offered a prayer asking for forgiveness, will come in 'seventy weeks of years' (Dan. 9.24), that is, 490 years. This breaks

into 'seven weeks' for the arrival of the anointed one (Dan. 9.25), 'sixty two weeks' to rebuild Jerusalem (9.25) until the sanctuary is destroyed (9.26). A prince – different from the anointed one? – will then make a covenant with 'many for one week' and then for 'half of the week' he is going to ensure the sacrifices cease. All of these weeks seem to refer to weeks of years, so we end up with 49 years until the anointed prince, 434 years to rebuild the temple, 7 years for the covenant with the prince (a total of 490) and 3½ years for the cessation of sacrifice. But the three weeks of Daniel's mourning and fasting last for just three normal weeks (preferable to 21 years), or 'weeks of days' as the text has it (Dan. 10.2–3) in order to distinguish from the other weeks, those of years. Further specific temporal markers include the 'appointed time' in 11.27 and 11.29, the 'time of the end' in 11.40 and 12.4, 9 and the curious 'a time, two times, and half a time' in 12.7 (see also 7.25) in answer to Daniel's question as to when the wonders will end. While the 1,290 days (although contrast the 2,300 evenings and mornings of Dan. 8.14) from the first desecration of the temple specifies the days of the three and a half years, the 1,335 days for which those who are blessed must wait seem to fall outside any of the schemas thus far (the equivalent is 3⅔ years). Even though the apocalyptic speculation concerning the crucial time of the end operates with an internal logic, this has not stopped commentators from trying to sort out the dates. If the 3½ years refers to Antiochus Epiphanes' desecration of the temple, then they suggest we can start to see how the text calculates events both backward to the exile (and the rebuilding of the temple) and forward to the much-anticipated end when Michael will roll in with the heavy artillery. But all this does is attempt to spell out the esoteric logic of the system itself, often with the assistance of the book of Jubilees and the Qumran material – an internal specificity that has no hold on reality.

What the text seems to offer is a code, a hidden language that is a mix of specific dates and events – note the detail of Chapter 11 – and hidden references that leave one guessing. For instance, 'Then shall arise in his place one who shall send an exactor of tribute through the territory of the kingdom; but within a few days he shall be broken, neither in anger nor in battle' (Dan. 11.20). The text is tantalizingly confident about the details and yet keeps everything closed: who is the 'one', or the 'exactor of tribute', and what does the reference to his being 'broken' mean? My own suspicion is

that we have the characteristic features of the coded language of political groups, insurrectionary movements that wish to keep their information hidden. Even so, I must be wary of trying to crack the code, like some infiltrator wishing to uncover a plot. Instead, we need to recognize that the language remains beyond our reach. Here I would suggest is an analogy to Benjamin's own esoteric writing practice, which was designed not to yield its content easily at all. In a similar way to Daniel, critics of Benjamin struggle to determine with greater specificity what he actually means – hence the tendency for that criticism to resort to detailed exegesis of his texts. Is there a coherent system to his thought? Do some texts have priority over others? Or does his work fall to pieces in the process of interpretation?

The language of Daniel resists all of these moves to sort out the meaning, whether by critical scholars or by the text itself. What are we to make of this peculiar and for many highly uncomfortable language – violent, extraterrestrial, misogynist and visionary? One avenue is to seek its precursors, whether in Persian dualism, Hellenistic syncretism, emergent gnostic influences, prophecy in the Hebrew Bible and its eschatological (Isa. 24–7, 40–55, 56–66; Zech. 9–14, Joel, Malachi) or visionary tendencies (Ezekiel; Zech. 1–8), cosmic wisdom, the royal cult, ancient Semitic myth, whether Babylonian or Canaanite, or a mix of some or all of these factors from both within and without the Hebrew Bible.[23]

Alternatively, the source of the apocalyptic language of Daniel lies with its form, although on this question critics revert to definitions of apocalyptic, such as revelation given by other-worldly beings with temporal and spatial dimensions in narrative frame.[24] The features of such language include novel phraseology, numerical systems, especially the three-plus-one pattern, quotation, allusion and paraphrase of other material in the Hebrew Bible.[25]

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[23] For instance, see many of the contributions to John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint (eds), *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception, Volume I* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); John J. Collins, Peter W. Flint, and Cameron Vanepps (eds), *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception, Volume II* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

[24] Collins, *Daniel*.

[25] Shemaryahu Talmon, 'Daniel', *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (eds); Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 343–56.

The symbolic world of the text has distinct temporal and spatial co-ordinates that see no problem making connections between the everyday events of politics and the extra-terrestrial realm of angels, archangels, heavenly visitors and armies. In fact, these are all part of one continuum, and the distinction between worldly and other-worldly is foreign to the text itself: the kings of Media and Persia, of Greece, of the north and south are as much part of this world as are Michael and Gabriel.

The language of naming

But I want to suggest that apart from searching for precursors and influence, or tackling the question of form, or even exploring comparisons between the Greek and Aramaic versions,[26] Benjamin's own comments on language are very pertinent for Daniel. As we saw earlier, Benjamin's argument is that the notion of language as communication of a certain content, a message, by means of a linguistic structure, is a bowdlerized and bourgeois depreciation of language itself, that the 'pure language' hinted at in the story of Genesis 2 is one in which 'mental being' communicates itself not through language – this is an instrumental view of language – but in language. And this ideal form of 'pure language' is none other than of naming, the practice that brings Adam closest to God. At creation, Adam has no one with whom to communicate except God, which is as good as communicating with himself. He does so through the name, which for Benjamin is the very nature of language itself. I want to suggest that in Daniel, especially Chapters 7–12, this 'pure language' of naming is also found, but in order to get there I need to make a number of moves.

To begin with, the text is full of names, whether explicit, mythical or obtuse. But what of the geographical references, such as Media, Persia, Greece and Chaldea, or Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia (Dan. 11.41–43), or the province of Elam on the river Ulai (Dan. 8.2, 15), or the Tigris and Uphaz, the source of gold (Dan. 10.4–5), as well as Jerusalem, Judah and Israel? Here we have a mythical geography in which

[26] Tim Meadowcroft, *Aramaic Daniel and Greek Daniel: A Literary Comparison* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

known and unknown place names provide the setting for an apocalyptic schema with its own agenda. These geographical names are less concerned with the actual geography, but rather have a similar function to the personal names, such as Daniel, Belshazzar, Michael, Gabriel, Moses, Cyrus and Darius. They are names with no referent. The latter two are of course kings of the past, but for this text they belong to a mythical panoply that hardly accords with any reality. To isolate them from all the other names in the text creates a false impression of the world of the text. They need to be placed alongside the four winds of heaven, the great sea, the four beasts, the lion with eagles' wings and the mind of a man, the bear with three ribs in its mouth, the leopard with four birds' wings and four heads, the terrible beast with iron teeth, claws of bronze and ten horns, the Ancient of Days with clothes as white as snow and hair like pure wool, a son of man, the saints of the Most High, the everlasting kingdom, a ram with two horns (one higher than the other), the floating he-goat with a single horn between his eyes subsequently replaced by four horns and a smaller horn, the Prince of the host or the Prince of princes, a holy one, another holy one, the great and terrible God, the man in linen and gold with a body of beryl, arms and legs shining like burnished bronze, and his words like the noise of a multitude, the one in the likeness of the sons of men, the book of truth, a branch of her roots, the one beloved by women, a god of the fortresses, the time of trouble, those who awake from the dust at the end time to everlasting life or to everlasting contempt, the wise who shine like the brightness of the firmament, who are like the stars, the two beings clothed in linen who stand on either side of the stream, one of whom raises both arms to heaven and the purified ones who make themselves white.

I have run through most of the names in Daniel 7–12, for it seems to me that too often they are forgotten in the rush to speak of the names that seem to have some known referent, those that communicate information beyond the closed system of the apocalyptic text. Yet they cannot be isolated from the weird and wonderful names that swamp the text. This also means that the apparently historical narrative, coded to be sure, of Daniel 11 joins this fantastic realm of mythical names: the kings of the south and the north, with their battles and multitudes, a daughter, sons, a glorious land, kingdoms, an exactor of tribute, strongholds, the

prince of the covenant, the table, Kittim, the temple, those who fail to refine themselves and become pure, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Egypt, Libya, Ethiopia, palatial tents, the sea and the glorious holy mountain.

This is a rush of naming to rival that of Adam's, with whom Benjamin is so enamoured. I want to take this one step further before introducing my own twist to Benjamin's argument: for Benjamin naming is the linguistic being of man, the innermost nature of language, and that language can communicate only *in* rather than *through* language. This means that the only possible communication of this pure language is with God. In Daniel 7–12 the only communication takes place between Daniel and God, especially in the prayer of 9.4–19. Otherwise, communication takes place between Daniel and various heavenly visitors, named or unnamed, intermediaries for God himself. And what does Daniel do in his confession of sin for the whole people? He drags out names from the Hebrew Bible: the prophets, kings, princes, fathers, people of the land, Judah, Jerusalem, Israel, Moses, the laws and Egypt. Again we have a closed system, one of internal reference to the Hebrew Bible itself, which can make sense only in light of those other narratives. Apart from this, Daniel repeatedly invokes variations on God's name – Yahweh Elohim, Yahweh my Elohim, Yahweh our Elohim, Yahweh, the great and terrible Elohim, Elohim, our Elohim, my Elohim. This is Benjaminian naming to a heightened degree, a language that is sufficient unto itself. No wonder the text is inaccessible, even playing with its reader by seeming to offer specific historical anchors only to wrest them away into a mythical world that has its own logic.

Benjamin's limits

Thus far, I have followed Benjamin's method quite closely in order to interpret Daniel 7 and related chapters. He does indeed provide some distinct insights that enable us to see that text in a different way. However, a question may be lurking in the reader's mind as I have engaged with Benjamin: what is Marxist about his work? Mystical, esoteric, theological even – these are the terms that more readily come to mind. Benjamin was a curious Marxist,

seeking to juxtapose his theological and biblical reflections with Marxist insights. At his best, he sought new ways to break out of the nightmare of capitalism, seeking to do so through unorthodox means. So he developed notions that prefer not to invoke the conventional Marxist category of revolution, but to seek an answer in one image after another. It may be waking from a dream,[27] or the enigmatic dialectic at a standstill,[28] or perhaps the flash of a camera, a 'flash with the now',[29] a 'posthumous shock' that breaks open the merely temporal relation between past and present.[30] However, when he comes to specific Marxist engagements with the economic and cultural reality of capitalism, his work is curiously undialectical. He seems satisfied with juxtaposing his theological reflections with Marxist observations, a practice that Adorno found particularly unpersuasive.[31]

So how might we understand Benjamin's work in light of his Marxism? I suggest that we can use his insights as I have deployed them in the interpretation of Daniel, but then take them a step further. Benjamin's theory of language (via a reading of Gen. 1–3) does indeed resonate with Daniel. The language of Daniel is a closed system, inaccessible to us, no matter how much commentators (enticed by the text) may try to anchor it. Yet the reason is – dialectically – a historical one: it comes from a vastly different cultural, ideological and political economic formation. That mode of production is one we struggle to understand, attempting to describe its broader workings (as I will do in the conclusion to this book) but failing to gain any foothold in the sensibilities, feelings and ways of being in the world that people then experienced. We simply cannot feel and think in the way that they did, for the gulf that separates our mode of production from theirs is too vast.

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[27] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, pp. 838, 845, 854–5, 863, 883.
[28] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 431.
[29] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 432.
[30] Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London: New Left Books, 1973), p. 132. See further Roland Boer, *Criticism of Heaven: On Marxism and Theology* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2009 [2007]), pp. 57–105.
[31] Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence, 1928–1940* (Henri Lonitz (ed.), trans. Nicholas Walker; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999 [1994]), pp. 108, 184, 284.

Daniel 7–12 is part of a world that remains closed to us, a world in which the king of Greece and Michael appear side by side, the terrible beast with iron teeth and claws of bronze beside Edom, the man made of beryl and bronze, dressed in linen and gold beside Moses. Daniel is so undecipherable because it comes from the ideological network of a mode of production that must strike us as so different, as so distant from that of capitalism that it leaves any reader from the context of capitalism nonplussed.

Summary

- For Walter Benjamin, allegory is a way of speaking about what cannot be represented in conventional ways.
- Ultimately, language refers not to something outside but to itself – a theory Benjamin develops through an interpretation of Genesis 1–3.
- Applied to the apocalyptic language of Daniel, this means that the text resists any effort at identifying what it represents.
- This has not prevented scholars from trying to anchor Daniel in many ways.
- The reason for the impossibility of identifying what Daniel refers to is that it comes from a mode of production that is ultimately alien and unknowable to us.

Conclusion: The sacred economy

The focus of the previous chapters has been mostly cultural and ideological, with a focus on the literature of the Hebrew Bible. Each Marxist critic has provided yet another angle on that literature, so that a fuller picture gradually began to emerge: the role of ideology in Genesis with a focus on women's bodies (Althusser); the unstable hegemony of Moses in Exodus (Gramsci); the multiple and internal forms of resistance in Leviticus (Deleuze and Guattari); the overlaps of class, ethnicity and gender in Ruth (Terry Eagleton); the tensions over the way space is produced in 1 Samuel (Henri Lefebvre); the way generic contradictions in a text function as traces of socio-economic tensions in the books of Kings (Georg Lukács); the paradoxes of divine justice in Isaiah (Theodor Adorno); the glimmers of protest atheism in Ezekiel (Ernst Bloch); the tensions over measure and immeasure, or order and chaos, in Job (Antonio Gramsci); the formal tensions of text and scholarship in the Psalms (Fredric Jameson); and the impenetrable language of Daniel (Walter Benjamin).

I do not wish to provide a summary of those arguments here, for I have already offered a synopsis in the introduction to this book. Instead, I would like to draw together the occasional comments on economics, which usually appeared at the close of most chapters. In some cases I also raised the question of class, especially in the chapter on Ruth. This conclusion, then, is explicitly about economics. It offers a summary of a book that I have written, called *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*.[1] That economy, or perhaps economies, is another and crucial component of the mode

[1] Roland Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*.

of the production within which the Hebrew Bible was written and gathered. And as I indicated from time to time, the tensions and struggles of that economy leave their marks on the texts in terms of both form and content. Those marks may be indirect and unexpected, functioning as creative responses to economic and social contradictions, but they are marks nonetheless.

While the resources for the reconstruction outlined here are archaeological and textual materials, it also draws upon the economic theories of the *Régulation* School and the work of Soviet-era Russian scholars of ancient Southwest Asia.[2] The value of the *Régulation* theorists will become clear in the reconstruction, but the reason for focusing upon Soviet scholarship is that it experienced first-hand some of the methods of agriculture used in ancient Southwest Asia. That is, the very backwardness of Russian agriculture into the early twentieth century (which changed by the 1930s) enabled a specific insight into ancient Southwest Asia. Such an insight was coupled with both theoretical sophistication and a tendency to discern the patterns of larger economic movements among all the detail, a tendency it drew from the Marxist tradition. Needless to say, I find less value in the main approaches still used in scholarship on ancient Southwest Asia,[3] especially neoclassical economics that remains dominant in our day, but also the Marxist-inspired world-systems theory of Immanuel Wallerstein and the Weberian proposals of Karl Polanyi.[4]

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[2] We should also keep in mind the caution that emerged from my discussion of Walter Benjamin, namely, that it is ultimately impossible to represent the systems of ancient economies. By using modern theories and methods, we entertain the impression that we can represent those economies, but our representations always remain impressions from our perspective.

[3] Algaze sums up this approach best when he describes the ancient world as 'partly capitalist'. Guillermo Algaze, *Ancient Mesopotamia at the Dawn of Civilization: The Evolution of an Urban Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 23.

[4] Immanuel Wallerstein, 'World System versus World Systems: A Critique', *Critique of Anthropology* 11 (1991), pp. 189–94; Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System IV: Centrist Liberalism Triumphant, 1789–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011 [1974]); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System II: Mercantilism*

From *Régulation* theory I draw the following methodological insights and approach to economic structures.[5] The assumptions are that economic activities are socially determined, part of the wide network of human relations; that contradiction and therefore crisis and not stability is the norm; that periods of 'stability' require an explanation in terms of the category of regime; and that any regime requires a set of implicit compromises, agreements and institutions to work (a mode of *régulation*). As for the structure, I develop three levels for analysing the economies of the ancient world. The basic building blocks are known as *institutional forms*, which combine new ways to produce distinct economic *regimes* over periods of time; they in turn form part of the overarching *mode of production*. Into this threefold structure I introduce a further distinction, between allocative and extractive economic patterns. As the terms indicate, allocative patterns depend on the allocation and reallocation of labour and the produce of labour, while extraction means the appropriation of the produce of labour

and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600–1750 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011 [1980]); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System III: The Second Era of Great Expansion of the Capitalist World-Economy, 1730s–1840s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011 [1989]); Karl Polanyi, *Primitive, Archaic and Modern Economies* (Boston: Beacon, 1971 [1968]); Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon, 2001 [1944]); Karl Polanyi, Conrad M. Arensberg and Harry W. Pearson (eds), *Trade and Market in the Early Empires: Economies in History and Theory* (New York: Free Press, 1957).

[5] I deliberately use '*régulation*', following the practice in Boyer and Saillard's crucial work. Why not 'regulation', as earlier translations tended to do? The semantic fields of both terms do not overlap very much. Rather than suggesting juridico-political regulation at a microeconomic level (for which the better French word would be *réglementation*), *régulation* designates the social, institutional and ideological factors that determine the stabilities and transformations of a system as a whole. Robert Boyer, 'Introduction', *Regulation Theory: The State of the Art* (Robert Boyer and Yves Saillard (eds); London: Routledge, 2002 [1995]), pp. 1–10 (1). For outlines of *Régulation* theory, see Robert Boyer and Yves Saillard (eds), *Régulation Theory: The State of the Art* (London: Routledge, 2002 [1995]); Robert Boyer, *The Regulation School: A Critical Introduction* (trans. Craig Charney; New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Alain Lipietz, *Mirages and Miracles: The Crises of Global Fordism* (London: Verso, 1987 [1985]); Alain Lipietz, 'The Regulation School: An Interview with Alain Lipietz', (2003), http://lipietz.net/spip.php?article750; Bob Jessop and Ngai-Ling Sum, *Beyond the Regulation Approach: Putting Capitalist Economies in their Place* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2006).

by those who do not work (the willing unemployed, namely, the ruling class and its hangers-on). This distinction is most relevant to the institutional forms or building blocks, for some are more allocative and others more extractive.

Institutional forms

We may distinguish between five institutional forms, the first and most important of which is subsistence–survival. Its importance is due to the fact that it concerns the 90–5 per cent of the population that was involved in agriculture.[6] Subsistence–survival relates to both maintaining herds and cultivating crops. Recent zooarchaeological research[7] has shown that the typical formation of herds involved two-thirds sheep and one-third goats. Sheep provide vital fibres and high-yield meat, along with milk, while goats are hardy and versatile animals. Both reproduce quickly. Having the two types of animal ensured that should disease affect one type,

[6] Despite that fact that the vast majority of the small populations were engaged in agriculture, mostly of a subsistence–survival form, agriculture is often bracketed out when 'the economy' is under consideration. Why? Left unto its own devices, that 'economy' concerns exchange, trade, wheeling and dealing for the sake of gain – or so it is assumed. The way agriculture then appears is through the production of cash crops or in animal husbandry for trade and profit. Needless to say, I find this approach wayward at best, thoroughly misleading at worst.

[7] For full bibliographical references, see Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*. However, out of that collection, I recommend David B. Landon, 'Zooarchaeology and Historical Archaeology: Progress and Prospects', *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 12 (2005), pp. 1–36; Aharon Sasson, 'The Role of Cattle and Economic Strategies in the Bronze and Iron Age at Tell Beer–Sheba, Israel', *Archaeozoology of the Near East VI: Proceedings of the Sixth International Symposium on the Archaeozoology of Southwestern Asia and Adjacent Areas* (Hijlke Buitenhuis et al. (eds); Groningen: Centre for Archeological Research and Consultancy, Rijksuniversiteit, 2005), pp. 208–21; Aharon Sasson, 'Reassessing the Bronze and Iron Age Economy: Sheep and Goat Husbandry in the Southern Levant as a Model Case Study', *Bene Israel: Studies in the Archaeology of Israel in the Bronze and Iron Ages in Honour of Israel Finkelstein* (Alexander Fantalkin and Assaf Yasur-Landau (eds); Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 113–34; Aharon Sasson, *Animal Husbandry in Ancient Israel: A Zooarchaeological Perspective on Livestock Exploitation, Herd Management and Economic Strategies* (London: Equinox, 2010).

the other type would remain to ensure survival until the affected part of the herd was able to recover. Herds were culled at regular intervals to maintain health and herd size. By contrast, bovines were few due to their heavy use of water and fodder. Evidence indicates that they were primarily used for traction and died at an advanced age.

The fields traversed by the bovines produced the necessary crops for subsistence–survival, with the major crops being emmer and einkorn wheat, barley and lentils, and minor crops being various types of pea, chickpeas, grapes, figs, dates, olives and nuts such as pistachio and almond. In a situation where land was plentiful and labour chronically limited, the primary concern in relation to the land was usufruct and labour. Notions of private property or the permanence of land ownership were irrelevant. Agricultural villages, with populations of typically 75–150, used a system of land shares (*kheleqat hassadeh* or *musha*ʿ) – a practice widespread in societies focused on subsistence–survival. In order to optimize labour, ensure soil preservation and consistent crops and ameliorate risk (natural and human), members of village-communes would allocate to each other strips of usually non-contiguous land. These were social units of measurements rather than clear demarcations of land for the purpose of ownership. The most common method of allocating these land shares was by lot, in order to ensure that all had to work the better and worse land at some time or other. Other methods included argument (often lengthy) and agreement by the whole village-commune, or by male heads of households or elders.

I would like to stress two features of the subsistence–survival institutional form. To begin with, it was the most stable and tested economic structure in ancient Southwest Asia. This was particularly the case in the marginal zone of the southern Levant, where ancient Israel eventually emerged late in the piece. Given its inherent practices of risk aversion through diversity, optimal rather than maximal use of land and animals and the production of surpluses for lean years rather than any idea of 'profit', people would revert to subsistence–survival when the hated systems of estates and tribute-exchange collapses. Further, the processes of herd and crop management were infused with the sacred. 'Religion' was not a compartmentalized feature of life, an ideology distinct from the realities of agriculture. Rather, it was inescapably woven in with the birth of healthy sheep and goats, with the rains and full

crop-yields, with the myriad determinations of the threats to that production. The gods gave and the gods took away.

Subsistence–survival was primarily an allocative form, a description that also applies to the second institutional form, that of kinship-household. Much recent research has focused on the household, but I would like to stress the flexibility and rhythms of the dual term, kinship-household. I suggest the following definition: it comprises the rhythms of life and flexible constructions of space within and without a distinct structure or collection of structures that may be more or less permanent, which is made possible by the social and economic context in which it is found. Let me say a little more about each of these terms. Household is far preferable to 'family', with its modern assumptions of (constructed) blood ties between human individuals. Thus, it is comprised of people, animals,[8] the smells, sounds, tastes and items of everyday life – tools, cooking pots, jugs, storage containers, clothes, pestles, lamps and so on. However, these are not static, for they involve constant rhythms, of movement within, of the flow of items, both animate and inanimate, into and out of the place, of the way space itself is produced through such rhythms.[9] That is, households are eminently flexible, constantly reusing items for different purposes, and reconfiguring internal and external space in multiple ways depending upon the needs of the moment. While 'household' emphasizes structures for dwelling, such dwellings may be more or less permanent. They may be anything from tents or ruins used for a season, or they may be longer-term structures made out of brick, timber, mud and plaster – whether the 'courtyard' cluster or ubiquitous 'pillared' dwelling in the southern Levant, with its three or four rooms. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that the household is contained within such spaces, for it comprises what is both external and internal to the various structures.

[8] The line between wild and domestic animals was sharper than the one between animals and human beings, so much so that domestic animals were regarded as part of the clan.

[9] I am indebted here to the insights of Henri Lefebvre, both his proposals concerning the production of space and 'rhythmanalysis'. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (trans. David Nicholson-Smith; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991 [1974]); Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (trans. Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore; London: Continuum, 2004).

Kinship-households are not discrete units, but constituted by the social and economic context in which they function, especially the clan village.[10] Finally, with the orbit of the kinship-household are found the practices of customary law and militias for defence against and the launching of raids.

To be added here is the minor and ambivalent institutional form of patron–client. Patronage may operate both alongside kinship and against it. The male head of household (*'ab*) may function as a patron, influencing patterns of allocation and reallocation. Yet, the patron may also cut across clan lines, seeking clients in a way that challenges familial organization. Thus, patronage leaves itself open to extractive forms of economic relations: the patron demands products in exchange for protection ('welfare'), uses his band to enforce his will and fosters a code of honour and shame (characteristic of gangsters and the obscenely rich). His band of followers cuts across clan lines, owes allegiance to him and fights for his cause, in return for security and the allocated products of plunder and agriculture.

Extraction is the determining nature of the two remaining institutional forms, which may be designated as estates and tribute-exchange. Estates were developed for both temple and palace, with the latter dominating. But they arose only with the establishment and expansion of states. These states were the result of intractable class conflict, the machinery of which is then seized by one class and turned into an instrument of its own agenda. This ruling class also developed agricultural estates, for as non-producers they had to find some way to live in the way to which they had become accustomed. The estates were administered either directly or by tenure, and labourers were indentured permanently or temporarily

[10] My thanks to Christina Petterson (personal communication) for this definition, which is drawn from her current work on the Moravian household in eighteenth-century Europe. See also Igor M. Diakonoff, 'The Commune in the Ancient East as Treated in the Works of Soviet Researchers', *Introduction to Soviet Ethnography, Volume II* (Stephen P. Dunn and Ethel Dunn (eds); Berkeley: Highgate Road Social Science Research Station, 1974), pp. 519–48 (530). Too often definitions of 'household' restrict it to human beings and veer towards the static. This is a legacy of the oft-cited definition of Wilk and Rathje, who specify: a) the social unit constituting the household; b) the material reality of the dwelling and its contents; c) human behaviour. Richard R. Wilk and William L. Rathje, 'Household Archaeology', *American Behavioral Scientist* 25 (1982), pp. 617–39 (618).

(corvée, debt and so on). Given the perpetual labour shortage, the estates constantly sought to draw more labourers from the village communities, with little concern for the continued viability of these communities.

The final institutional form is that of tribute-exchange, which really concerns the many faces of plunder, whether crude, polite external, polite internal or elite plunder. These are usually known as plunder *per se*, tribute, taxation and exchange. However, they are all forms of booty, since the underlying purpose is acquisition through some form of extortion. They differ from estates, which extracted what they felt they needed through exploitation. By contrast, tribute-exchange operated by means of expropriation of another's produce. While the patterns of tribute were determined by what was internal to the loose and vague boundaries of the ruler's state, here we also find the development of exchange, markets and coinage. It is clear that long-distance exchange was in preciosities – high value, luxury items, as indicated in the legendary tale of 1 Kings. 10.14–22 – since it was simply impossible to shift bulk goods over such distances. At a local level, usually between villages within eyesight of one another, some exchange did take place for items not obtainable locally. Yet an important shift took place in the first millennium, when the need to provision ever larger armies led rulers to use the newly invented coinage as both a form of pay and of taxation (as I indicated in my treatment of 1–2 Kings in Chapter 7).[11] With rulers paying soldiers in coin and then demanding taxes in coin, farmers found themselves expanding local markets to sell produce to soldiers. With the coins so acquired, they could pay their taxes. In other words, the

[11] Remarkably, coinage first arose in three different parts of the world (China, India and Lydia), using very different technologies (casting, punching and pressing), at a similar time (c. 600 BCE) for very similar socio-economic reasons. During the economic disequilibrium and incredible violence beginning around 800 BCE, (the infamous 'Axial Age'), systems of mutual credit broke down. What was needed was an objective mode of transaction. The mercenary soldier was a bad credit risk, as were the villagers who readily moved to avoid one form of disaster after another, if not to join a marauding band in the hills. So one needed a weighable, quantifiable form of payment which both parties could trust, given one would not see the other again after the transaction. Coinage is thereby like the drug-dealer's suitcase of cash. See David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (New York: Melville House, 2011), pp. 49–50, 212–13.

primary function of markets in the first millennium was logistical (provisioning empires) rather than profit-based. Markets were thus by-products of the state's concerns.[12]

Regimes

Thus, the building blocks known as institutional forms are subsistence–survival, kinship-household, patronage, estates and tribute-exchange.[13] The first three are largely allocative, while the remaining two are extractive, although there are overlaps between them. At different economic periods, the institutional forms were arranged in different ways, in patterns of dominance and subservience. These arrangements or constellations are the regimes, which may be termed the subsistence regime, the palatine regime and the regime of plunder. Obviously, the dominant form in each constellation is, respectively, subsistence, estates and tribute-exchange. Here only the first is allocative, characteristic of the bulk of the population engaged in agriculture, while the other two are extractive, the approaches of the little and big kingdoms and their brutish potentates. With the regimes we can move from a largely synchronic analysis to a diachronic one that traces the conflicts and changing patterns of regimes over time.

The subsistence regime was characteristic of what are usually called times of economic crisis or chaos – ever-present, but notable in the third millennium, the middle of the second millennium and in the closing centuries of the second millennium (in this last period, the much-studied settlements in the Judean hills appear). It was the dominant regime found in the southern Levant and

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[12] Contrary to the assumption that markets are driven by the profit motive, it is worth noting that most markets in history have not been profit-making ventures. In this light, we need to refine some common terms, especially market, trade and surplus. Thus, they had markets, but not primarily for profit; they had trade, but for preciosities; they had surpluses, but for subsistence.

[13] It is worth noting here that scholars occasionally mistake an institutional form as the foundation of the whole economy, indeed as a mode of production in its own right. Examples include the household (or domestic or communitarian mode of production), patronage (or patrimonialism), a tribute-based mode of production and exchange as the core economic driver.

thereby of ancient Israel. I argue that it was in fact the most stable of all regimes, and usually the most creative of times – usable inventions happen during such periods. The palatine regime (an extractive one) characterized the efforts of various potentates and despots to seize control of states and support themselves and their dependents by means of agricultural estates. Inherently unstable, the palatine regime rose and collapsed time and again, only to run completely out of steam by the thirteenth century. In its place, the regime of booty characterized the first millennium and its large empires. It varied between crude plunder (Assyrian Empire) and the more refined forms of taxation and tribute, enabled by the use of coinage and development of markets as by-products of the state's overriding concerns with provisioning its military and bureaucracy (Persian or Achaemenid Empire). The regime of booty was also deeply unstable, and fell apart readily, as the spectacular collapse of these empires shows only too well.

What is the place of ancient Israel (whenever it arose in the first millennium BCE) within these larger economic patterns? Israel was of course one of the little kingdoms that flashed briefly before becoming an imperial province. It was therefore extremely marginal at economic, political and cultural levels. The paradox is that because it was a 'poor and menacing land',[14] it had a relative but blessed relief, due to the tyranny of distance, from the machinations of the centres of power. This reality ensured that the subsistence regime was the major economic reality for most of the time. It may have been subject from time to time to extractive patterns, whether by neighbouring powers that sought to bring it under their temporary sway, or during the short period of being a little kingdom, or during its provincial status later in the first

[14] Mario Liverani, *Israel's History and the History of Israel* (trans. Chiara Peri and Philip Davies; London: Equinox, 2005), p. 6. Liverani goes on to write: 'Seen within a regional dimension, then, the marginality of the land appears with stark clarity: it lies to the extreme south of the "Fertile Crescent", the semicircle of cultivated lands between the Syro-Arabian desert, the Iranian and Anatolian mountains and the Mediterranean sea. The role that geography dictates for this land, if any, is to serve as a connection (more for transit than for settlement) between Egypt and Western Asia: but this location seems to have brought the inhabitants of Palestine more misfortune than benefit.'

millennium, but it kept reverting to the tried and resilient regime of subsistence, with its core institutional form of subsistence–survival.

However, I would like to emphasize the internal contradictions that are constitutive of the whole system. These differing regimes, constructed out of the institutional forms in their different combinations, together form what I call the sacred economy. An earlier term for this system is the Asiatic mode of production, but since I have offered a wholesale reconstruction of the mode of production I prefer to speak of the sacred economy. The contradictions of that mode of production operated at two levels: between the different regimes and between the institutional forms that made up those regimes. At the level of regimes, the tensions appear between the subsistence regime and the regimes of palatine estates and of plunder. Whenever people – that is, the vast majority of those engaged in subsistence agriculture – had the opportunity, they reverted to a subsistence regime, since it was the most stable and ensured long-term survival. However, the palatine regime of estates and, in the first millennium, the regime of plunder sought to make the subsistence farmers subservient to their imperial aspirations. In particular, the palatine regime preferred to undermine the village communes of subsistence farmers, since estates had higher yields and served their own 'needs' more directly (village-communes under the intermittent control of despots yielded only ten per cent in taxation while estates yielded between one-third and one-half for the ruling class). For their part, the subsistence farmers would break from the estate system when the pressure became too great. Tried and true tactics were deployed time and again. They would leave crops unharvested, take to the hills to join the 'nomads' (*habiru*), relocate villages out of the reach of despotic forces, or willingly take part in the destruction of an oppressive ruler's power whenever the opportunity arose. Similar tactics were also used during the first millennium when the regime of plunder became dominant. So we find these tensions between and within the different regimes: within the regimes, the institutional forms of subsistence–survival struggled with those of estates and tribute-exchange; between the regimes, the subsistence regime constantly resisted the imposition of palatine and plundering regimes.

I mentioned earlier that ancient Israel operated primarily under a subsistence regime. Yet that regime did face perpetual struggle. Internal to Israel, it had to contend with sporadic efforts to instal

a belated estate system – belated because in the first millennium the estate system was obsolete. Elsewhere, the regime of plunder had become dominant, and it impinged on ancient Israel in terms of external imperial expansion. So here too, especially when Israel became the province of Yehud, the subsistence regime faced the perpetual threats of a regime of plunder. Here may be found the socio-economic tensions within which the Hebrew Bible was written and compiled. Another way of describing this tension is in terms of allocation versus extraction, with the former characteristic of subsistence–survival and the latter of estates and tribute-exchange.

Sacred tensions

It is precisely these tensions that provided the troubled background in which the Hebrew Bible in all its variety arose. Given those many-layered tensions, one would expect that they would appear also in the texts I have studied. With Exodus 18 and Leviticus 16 (Deleuze and Guattari) it was the multiple modes of resistance, which may now be read as forms of the constitutive resistance of subsistence–survival to palatine and plundering regimes (both forms of what Deleuze and Guattari call the signifying regime). In 1 Samuel 1–2 (Lefebvre) it appeared in the shifting productions of space in light of local and external factors, where we may see the impression of a regime of plunder on the local tensions between estates and subsistence. With 1–2 Kings (Lukács) the generic tensions reveal an ideological effort to deal with the belated effort in the southern Levant to install a palatine regime when in most other places in ancient Southwest Asia we find a regime of plunder. With Job (Negri) it becomes the challenge to Yahweh, the effort to bend transcendence to immanence in a way that asserts the validity of those who challenge the powers that be. In the Psalms (Jameson), it is the contradictions of form, which may now be read as the formal trace of irresolvable socio-economic tensions. These tensions also have other manifestations, such as the obsession over controlling wombs in Genesis 25 in light of the chronic shortage of labour (Althusser), or the twisting identifications of class and ethnicity in the suppression of gender in Ruth (Eagleton), or the

ambivalence of Moses as a liberating or oppressive figure in Exodus 32 (Gramsci) or the breakdown of the idea of ruling-class justice in Isaiah 5 (Adorno), let alone the protest 'atheism' of Ezekiel (Bloch).

But I have not yet indicated how these manyfold textual representations relate to the various institutional forms and regimes within the mode of production I have called the sacred economy. They certainly do not relate in a one-to-one (or allegorical) fashion, where a particular economic tension may be pegged to a cultural and literary one. Instead, the idea of mode of *régulation* offers an explanation. Earlier, I indicated that any period of relative stability, a regime, requires an explanation (rather than a period of crisis, for that was the norm). How does a regime achieve stability for a time? It requires cultural and ideological elements, along with institutional structures, which function to produce a series of compromises between the conflicting elements of a regime. To quote Lipietz:

> There are two aspects of the process. The first operates as *habitus*, as Bourdieu would say, in the minds of individuals with a particular culture and willingness to play by the rules of the game. The other operates through a set of institutions and may vary widely, even within the same basic pattern of social relations … We call a set of such behavioral patterns and institutions a *mode of régulation*.[15]

The key here is compromise. Constraint (laws and rules) plays a role, as do patterns of behaviour and assumptions that are both reinforced and challenged, but compromise is crucial. That compromise is as much an ideological and cultural one as it is economic. For the Hebrew Bible, if not for the whole of ancient Southwest Asia, those efforts took place in terms of the sacred. And when we have compromise, we have those unsatisfied with the compromise, those who challenge the compromise since they have given up too much. We also have continual efforts to overcome the tensions that the compromise seeks to ameliorate. For the Hebrew

[15] Lipietz, 'The Regulation School: An Interview with Alain Lipietz'. See also Jessop and Sum, *Beyond the Regulation Approach: Putting Capitalist Economies in their Place*, pp. 14–15.

Bible those efforts are literary and theological. Yet a literary and theological effort at overcoming a tension succeeds only at an ideological level, for it cannot resolve a socio-economic tension. We would expect then that, in their very effort to overcome such tensions, those tensions will recur in all manner of unexpected ways.

Summary

- This chapter proposes a model for the economy of ancient Southwest Asia, in which Israel and the province of Yehud arrived late on the scene.
- It uses *Régulation* theory and Soviet-era Russian methods as its basis.
- The five building blocks (institutional forms) of that primarily agricultural economy are subsistence–survival, kinship-household, patronage, estates and tribute-exchange.
- These institutional forms are arranged in different combinations over time to produce three regimes: the subsistence regime, the palatine regime and the regime of plunder.
- The palatine regime characterized the period until the thirteenth century BCE, while the regime of plunder dominated in the first millennium BCE.
- The subsistence regime was the preferred regime by the vast majority of farmers, and they reverted to it whenever they had the opportunity (times of 'crisis'). It was the characteristic regime of the marginal zone of the southern Levant where Israel appears.
- The literary and ideological tensions of the Hebrew Bible are the result of the compromises (modes of *régulation*) that were necessarily expressed in terms of the sacred. These compromises were needed for each regime to function for a while and were also the causes of their repeated collapse.
- All of these features are parts of the mode of production I call the sacred economy.

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